

# VOLUME C: The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century



THE NORTON  
ANTHOLOGY  
**ENGLISH**  
LITERATURE

THE  
RESTORATION  
AND THE  
EIGHTEENTH  
CENTURY

**VOLUME C**  
ELEVENTH EDITION

# The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century, 1660–1785



***A Philosopher Giving That Lecture on the Orrery, in Which a Lamp Is Put in Place of the Sun*** (detail), 1766, Joseph Wright. For more information about this painting, see the [Image Gallery](#) for this volume.

---

1660: Charles II restored to the English throne

1672: The Royal African Company founded

1688–89: The Glorious Revolution: deposition of James II and accession of William of Orange

1707: Act of Union unites Scotland, England, and Wales, creating the nation of "Great Britain"

1714: Queen Anne's death marks the end of Stuart rule and George I becomes the first Hanoverian king

1757: Victory in the Battle of Plassey consolidates British East India Company control in parts of India

1775–83: American Revolution



The period between 1660 and 1785 brought important changes to the island of Great Britain, which became a single nation after 1707, when the Act of Union joined Scotland to England and Wales. Across these years, Britain's national population nearly doubled to ten million and literacy rose to include most of the middle classes and many among the poor. Britain became a central actor in international commerce and the transatlantic trade in enslaved people, and it increasingly extended its imperial power globally. New ideas about science, reason, liberty, rights, politeness, sentiment, and sympathy transformed the intellectual scene.

This same period brought important changes to English literature. In 1660, the playhouses—closed since the beginning of the Civil War in 1642—sprang back to life with witty, bawdy comedies written and acted by women as well as men. An expanding assortment of increasingly affordable printed works—including newspapers and magazines—was available to the reading public, who debated the ideas in coffeehouses and quoted their favorite lines of poetry at pleasure gardens and concert halls. Poets aimed to intervene in social, political, and philosophical discussions, but also experimented with more private or personal ways of expressing intense emotion. Novelistic forms flourished, as prose romances and travel narratives were joined by more domestic and psychologically detailed fictions.

This period, moreover, brought important changes to the very idea of “English literature.” You are reading *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*—in a real way, eighteenth-century debates about literature and the canon made this anthology possible, even shaping the academic course that likely prompted you to purchase it. When Samuel Johnson defined the word *literature* in his 1755 *Dictionary*, he offered the older meaning, “Learning; skill in letters.” Literature in today's sense—creative or imaginative writing—was associated with the larger category of *belles lettres*, which could also include rhetoric, history, philosophy, and essays. Over the course of this period, however, our modern meanings of *literature* began to

consolidate, as writers were praised for their “originality” and “imagination.” Eighteenth-century writers, moreover, self-consciously forged a canon of *English* literature. As they created new editions of old works, wrote histories of English poetry, and narrated biographies of influential past writers, these canon-makers patriotically celebrated an English-speaking tradition stretching from Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare to Milton and the best poets writing in their moment.

The eighteenth century also saw the first university courses featuring English literature (as opposed to Greek or Latin literature, staples of elite education). Since much canon-making was a patriotic English project, it is striking that the first universities to teach English literature were not in England but in Scotland, which had formally joined Britain with the Act of Union but had a complicated relation with the dominating center of British power in England. While some Scots embraced Scottish patriotism against the English, others—self-conscious modernizers, anxious about their provincial accents and their physical and cultural distance from metropolitan London—wanted to forge a new “British” identity. These Scots began offering lectures on “Rhetoric and the Belles Lettres” that used English literature to teach a “correct,” “polite” writerly style (free of Scottish words and idioms that were sometimes described as relics of a “primitive” or “barbarous” past). In an ideologically fraught way, English literature was used for a project of “polite” refinement, for educating especially those among the lower classes and in the colonies. At the same time, however, English literature was being written by people across the social spectrum and was also used as a tool for challenging existing power structures—as it was during the early days of the movement to abolish slavery. Literature in English was written not only in England but all over the globe—including in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, India, North America, Jamaica, and Turkey. In all these places, “English literature” allowed for self-assertion, satire, experimentation, and even play—and such play could have its own world-shaping implications.

This Norton volume contains some of the richest, most fascinating literary texts from the Restoration and eighteenth century—written by a more diverse and representative selection of writers than the few White male poets central to the eighteenth century's own canon-making projects. The texts included here are works of art, but they are also often focused on political, moral, and philosophical questions: this is a literature oriented toward and participating in the bustling social world of the period. The canonical literature collected in this anthology thus constitutes a rich site for understanding the changes that helped create our modern world.

# RELIGION, POLITICS, AND BRITAIN IN THE WORLD

The Restoration of 1660—the return of Charles Stuart (son of the beheaded King Charles I) and, with him, the monarchy to England—brought hope to a divided nation, exhausted by years of civil war and political turmoil. Many of Charles’s subjects welcomed him home from his exile. After the abdication of Richard Cromwell in 1659 and the end of the Commonwealth, the country had seemed at the brink of chaos, and Britons were eager to believe that their king would bring order and law and a spirit of mildness back into the national life. But no political settlement could be stable until the religious issues had been resolved. The restoration of the monarchy meant that the Church of England would also be restored, and though Charles was willing to pardon or ignore many former enemies (such as John Milton), some of the Anglican clergy were less tolerant of dissent. When Parliament reimposed the Book of Common Prayer in 1662 and then in 1664 barred Nonconformists from religious meetings outside the established church, thousands of clergymen resigned their livings, and the jails were filled with preachers like John Bunyan who refused to be silenced. In 1673 the Test Act required all holders of civil and military offices to take the sacrament in an Anglican church and to deny belief in transubstantiation. Thus Protestant Dissenters and Roman Catholics were largely excluded from public life; for instance, Alexander Pope, a Catholic, could not attend a university, own land, or vote. Some Anglicans showed scorn for Protestant Nonconformist zeal, or “enthusiasm” (a belief in private revelation), and English Catholics were widely regarded as potential traitors and (wrongly) thought to have set the Great Fire that destroyed much of London in 1666.

Yet the triumph of the established church did not resolve the constitutional issues that had divided Charles I and Parliament. Charles II promised to govern through Parliament but slyly tried to consolidate royal power. Steering away from crises, he hid his

Catholic sympathies and avoided a test of strength with Parliament—except on one occasion. In 1678 the report of the Popish Plot, in which Catholics would rise and murder their Protestant foes, terrified London; and though the charge turned out to be a fraud, the House of Commons exploited the fear by trying to force Charles to exclude his Catholic brother, James, Duke of York, from succession to the throne. The turmoil of this period is captured brilliantly by John Dryden's poem *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681). Finally, Charles defeated this attempt to prevent James from becoming king by dissolving Parliament. But the crisis resulted in a basic division of the country between two new political parties: the Tories, who supported the king, and the Whigs, the king's opponents.

Neither party was thrilled with James II. After he came to the throne in 1685, he claimed the right to make his own laws, suspended the Test Act, and began to fill the army and government with fellow Catholics. The birth of James's son in 1688 brought matters to a head, confronting the nation with the prospect of a Catholic dynasty. Secret negotiations paved the way for the Dutchman William of Orange, a champion of Protestantism and the husband of James's Protestant daughter Mary. William landed with a small army in southwestern England and marched toward London. As he advanced, the king's allies melted away, and James fled to a permanent exile in France. But the house of Stuart would be heard from again. For more than half a century some loyal Jacobites (from the Latin *Jacobus*, "James"), especially in Scotland, supported James, his son ("the Old Pretender"), and his grandson ("the Young Pretender" or "Bonnie Prince Charlie") as the legitimate rulers of Britain. Moreover, a good many writers, from Aphra Behn and Dryden (and arguably Pope and Johnson) to Robert Burns, privately sympathized with Jacobitism. But after the failure of one last rising in 1745–46, the cause would dwindle gradually into a wistful sentiment. In retrospect, the accession of William and Mary in 1688—the Glorious, or Bloodless, Revolution—came to be seen as the beginning of a stabilized, unified Great Britain.



A number of innovations made this stability possible. In 1689 a Bill of Rights revoked James's actions; the bill limited the powers of the Crown, reaffirmed the supremacy of Parliament, and guaranteed some individual rights. The same year the Toleration Act relaxed the strain of religious conflict by granting a limited freedom of worship to Dissenters (although not to Catholics or Jews) so long as they swore allegiance to the Crown. This proved to be a workable compromise. The passage of the Act of Settlement in 1701 seemed finally to resolve the difficult problem of succession that had bedeviled the monarchy. Anne, James II's Protestant younger daughter, was next in line after William. Though Anne was pregnant seventeen times, including many stillbirths, her last surviving child died young in 1700, leaving her without a successor. In the wake of this, the Act of Settlement put Anne's nearest Protestant relative—Sophia, the electress of Hanover in Germany, who was James I's granddaughter—and her descendants in line for the throne. Queen Anne reigned from 1702 to 1714, and upon her death George I, Sophia's son, came to Britain to become the first king of the Hanoverian line that would rule until 1901.

But the succession being settled did not eliminate the political rancor that often animates contests for power. During the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14) in Queen Anne's reign, Britain and its allies weakened the power of commercial rivals France and Spain, and the Whig lords and London merchants supporting the war grew rich and held enormous power in the government. But the Whigs pushed their luck too hard: powerful Whig leader John Churchill, the Duke of Marlborough, with his wife made requests that angered the Queen, and others were working to defend Dissenters and their practice of occasional conformity (which offered a way around the Test Act). Anne fought back, dismissing her Whig ministers and calling in Robert Harley and Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke, to form a Tory ministry. When Whigs returned to power after Anne's death and the accession of George I, Harley was imprisoned in the Tower of London for several years and Bolingbroke, charged with being a Jacobite traitor, fled to France. The great architect of Whig

policy in the following decades was Sir Robert Walpole, who came to power as a result of the "South Sea Bubble" (1720), a stock market crash. Walpole had an ability to restore confidence and keep the country running smoothly, as well as to juggle money. Coming to be known as Britain's first "prime" minister, Walpole consolidated his power during the reign of George II (1727–60). George II, more involved in British affairs than his essentially German father, came to appreciate the efficient administration of the patronage system under Walpole, who installed dependents in government offices and controlled the House of Commons by financially rewarding its members.

The political principles of the Whig and Tory parties, which bring so much fire to eighteenth-century public debate, evolved through the period to address changing circumstances. Now we tend to think of Tories as conservative and Whigs as liberal. (Members of today's Conservative Party in the United Kingdom are sometimes called Tories.) During the Exclusion Crisis of the 1680s the Whigs asserted the liberties of the English subject against the royal prerogatives of Charles II, whom Tories such as Dryden supported. After both parties survived the 1688 Glorious Revolution, the Tories guarded the preeminence of the established church, while Whigs tended to support toleration of Dissenters. Economically, too, Tories defined themselves as traditionalists, affirming landownership as the proper basis of wealth, power, and privilege (though most thought trade honorable), whereas the Whigs came to be seen as supporting a new "moneyed interest" (as Jonathan Swift called it): managers of the Bank of England (founded 1694), contrivers of the system of public credit, and investors in the stock market. But conservatism and liberalism did not exist as ideological labels in the period, and the vicissitudes of party dispute offer many surprises. When Bolingbroke returned to England in 1724 after being pardoned, he led a Tory opposition that decried the "ministerial tyranny" of Walpole's Whig government. This opposition patriotically hailed liberty in a manner recalling the Whig rhetoric of earlier decades, appealed to both landed gentry and urban merchants, and

anticipated the antigovernment radicalism of the end of the eighteenth century. Many writers embraced Bolingbroke's Tory rhetoric extolling fierce independence from the corrupting power of centralized government and concentrations of wealth: for instance, John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) drew parallels between great criminals and great politicians. Conversely, the Whigs sought to secure a centralized fiscal and military state machine and a web of financial interdependence controlled by the wealthiest aristocrats.

As this machine was built and maintained through the century, Britain's place in the world changed dramatically. In the early 1660s, when the events described in Behn's *Oroonoko* are supposed to have taken place, England was just beginning to ramp up its involvement in the transatlantic trade in enslaved people. Charles helped found the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa in 1660, which was later reconstituted as the Royal African Company. English, then British, ships forcibly took people from the west coast of Africa, across the Atlantic to the Americas, often to the brutally productive colonies in the Caribbean that farmed sugar cane. The ships then returned to England with money and sugar, a profitable colonial commodity. Britain's involvement in slaving would increase dramatically across the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and by the time of abolition in the early nineteenth century, British enslavers would have taken over three million African people from their homes. This terrible trade was immensely lucrative for Britain. Bristol and then Liverpool developed into prosperous ports, and by the 1780s the British national economy depended on the trade. The human cost was terrible. Torn from their homes, enslaved people were often packed into ships in spaces too small to allow them to turn, with barely enough food and drink and air to keep them alive. It is estimated that 15 percent, on average, died on each crossing; on a bad voyage the death toll would be much worse. Nor did those who survived the Middle Passage, as it came to be called, feel fortunate for long, given the terrible conditions of labor in Britain's Caribbean sugar colonies. It was only at the end of the period this volume covers, in the 1780s, that the movement for the

abolition of slavery began to exert popular influence in Britain, though these years were also marked by parliamentary setbacks. While abolition would not be achieved until the nineteenth century, in the meantime many writers took up their pens to write arguments and poems, both for and against slavery. (See “Britain and Transatlantic Slavery,” [p. 926](#).)

Slavery was a crucial part of the British Empire, which also expanded dramatically in this period. In 1660, England had control over Ireland and Wales in the British Isles and had established colonies in North America and the Caribbean. It also had trade relations across the globe. In the following decades, commerce motivated more and more territorial claims. Indeed, increasingly across the period Britain deployed its powerful navy to secure a series of military victories that consolidated and extended its colonial power. For instance, William Pitt the elder, a powerful prime minister after Walpole, appealed to a spirit of patriotism and called for the expansion of British power and commerce overseas. Pitt helped orchestrate the defeat of the French in the Seven Years’ War (1756–63), especially in North America, and the 1763 Peace of Paris consolidated British rule in Canada and India. British power worked *very* differently in these different places, however, and it was never without controversy. Eventually, American colonists revolted against what they described as the tyranny of King George III (who reigned in Britain from 1760 to 1820). Not even the loss of the American colonies in the American Revolution (1775–83), though, could slow British imperial ambitions. Asia, Africa, and the Pacific increasingly became central sites for British imperial—and commercial—ambition. Britain in the eighteenth century was no isolated island but a nation with conflicts, investments, and subjects around the world. (See “Global Commerce and Empire,” [p. 323](#).)

At home, however, there was discontent. Though London—a bustling multiracial city (in 1768, at least 15,000 Black people lived there)—was becoming a center of global commerce, the wealth brought to England by industrialism and foreign trade had not spread to the great mass of the poor. Only White male property

owners could vote in parliamentary elections, and, for much of the century, rich families' alliances and rivalries, national and local, dominated politics. But the practice of enclosure—private landowners “enclosing” with fences what had been common areas supporting a larger community—had displaced many to the cities, and the urban poor were increasingly subject to intense criminalization: even some minor crimes like pickpocketing were punishable with the death penalty. Other common punishments included the pillory and forced transportation to the colonies. As the century progressed, it seemed to many that the bonds of custom that once held people together had finally broken, and now money alone was respected. Protestants turned violently against Catholics; in 1780 the Gordon Riots put London temporarily under mob rule. Around the same time, radical reformers such as John Wilkes, Richard Price, and Catharine Macaulay called for a new, more just and equitable political republic. Fear of their radicalism would contribute to the conservative British reaction against the French Revolution. In the last decades of the century British authors would be torn between two opposing attitudes: loyalty to the old traditions of hierarchy, mutual obligations, and local self-sufficiency, and yearning for a new dispensation founded on principles of liberty, the rule of reason, and human rights.



## THE CONTEXT OF IDEAS

Much of the most powerful writing after 1660 exposed divisions in the nation's thinking inherited from the tumult of earlier decades. As the possibility of a Christian commonwealth receded, the great republican John Milton published *Paradise Lost* (final version, 1674), and John Bunyan's immensely popular masterwork *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) expressed the conscience of a Nonconformist. Conversely, an aristocratic culture, led by Charles II himself, aggressively celebrated pleasure and the right of the elite to behave as they wished. Members of the court scandalized respectable London citizens and considered their wives and daughters fair game. The court's hero, John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, became a celebrity for enacting the sexually exuberant creed of a libertine and rake.

In the Restoration, too, Charles II gave official approval to science by chartering the Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge in 1662. New features of the world were disclosed to everyone who had the chance to look. Two wonderful inventions, the microscope and telescope, had begun to reveal that nature is more extravagant—teeming with tiny creatures and boundless galaxies—than anyone had ever imagined. One book that stayed popular for more than a century, Bernard de Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (1686; translated from French by Behn), suggested that an infinite number of alternate worlds and living creatures might exist, not only in outer space but under our feet, invisibly small. Travels to unfamiliar regions of the globe enlarged understandings of what nature could do, and appetites for wondrous facts and curious objects kept pace with the economic motives of world exploration and colonization. (See "Science, Society, and God," [p. 93](#).)

Excited by new developments in science and philosophy, some people began to argue that the achievements of modern inquiry had eclipsed those of the ancients (and the fathers of the Church), who

had not known about the solar system, the Americas, microscopic organisms, or the circulation of the blood. Yet, the school curriculum still began with years of Latin and Greek and focused on the long-established humanistic tradition. A “Battle of the Books” erupted in the late seventeenth century between champions of ancient and of modern learning—in Jonathan Swift’s satire of that title, tomes of Aristotle battled Cartesian philosophy, and editions of modern poets looked insignificant next to Virgil’s volumes. But as stark as the contrasts were during the Restoration between ancients and moderns, religious and libertine intellectuals, royalists and republicans, High Churchmen and Nonconformists, the court and the rest of the country, a spirit of compromise was brewing.

Perhaps the most widely shared intellectual impulse of the age was a distrust of dogmatism. Nearly everybody blamed it for the civil strife through which the nation had recently passed. Opinions varied widely about which dogma was most dangerous—Puritan enthusiasm, papal infallibility, the divine right of kings, medieval scholastic or modern Cartesian philosophy—but these were denounced in remarkably similar terms. Though this might seem surprising in an age often described today as the “Enlightenment,” writers from across the political and social spectrum portrayed overconfidence in human reasoning as the supreme disaster. Many philosophers, divines, and advocates of science began to embrace a mitigated skepticism, which argued that human beings could readily achieve a sufficient degree of necessary knowledge (sometimes called “moral certainty”), but also contended that the pursuit of absolute certainty was vain, mad, and socially calamitous. Perhaps John Locke best expresses the temper of the times in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690):

If by this inquiry into the nature of the understanding, I can discover the powers thereof; how far they reach; to what things they are in any degree proportionate; and where they fail us, I suppose it may be of use, to prevail with the busy mind of man to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its comprehension; to stop when it is at the

utmost extent of its tether; and to sit down in a quiet ignorance of those things which, upon examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our capacities. . . . Our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct.

Such a position is Pope's, when he warns against human presumption in *An Essay on Man* and Johnson's, when he talks of "the business of living."

Clearly, these ideas had important implications for religion. They led to some Anglican clergy's dislike of emotion and "enthusiasm" in religion and their emphasis on good works, rather than faith, as the way to salvation. If, as the commentator Martin Clifford put it in *A Treatise of Humane Reason* (1675), "in this vast latitude of probabilities," a person thinks "there is none can lead one to salvation, but the path wherein he treads himself, we may see the evident and necessary consequence of eternal troubles and confusions." Such writers insist that a distrust of human capacities is fully compatible with religious faith: for them the inability of reason and sensory evidence to settle important questions reveals our need to accept Christian mysteries as our intellectual foundation. At the same time, scientific discovery also opened up the possibility of "natural religion" (the study of nature as a book written by God). Newly discovered natural laws, such as Newton's celestial mechanics, seemed evidence of a universal order in creation, which implied God's hand in the design of the universe, as a watch implies a watchmaker. Some intellectuals embraced Deism, the doctrine that religion need not depend on mystery or biblical truths and could rely on reason alone, which recognized the goodness and wisdom of natural law and its creator. However, other Christians shuddered at the idea of an impersonal clockwork universe without God's active participation. Instead, they rested their faith on the revelation of Scripture, the scheme of salvation in which Christ died to redeem their sins.

Religious ideas about souls and minds in the period could also bolster powerful arguments by women and the disenfranchised. The

groundbreaking intellectual Mary Astell, in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694) and *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700, 1706), initiated a strain of modern feminism, arguing for the establishment of women's educational institutions and decrying the tyranny that husbands legally exercised over their wives. She nonetheless mocked the calls for political rights and liberty by Locke and other Whig theorists, rights that pointedly did not extend to women. Instead, she and other early feminists, including Sarah Fyge Egerton and Mary, Lady Chudleigh, embraced the Tory principle of obedience to royal and church authority. Astell feared the doctrines of male revolutionaries could produce civil chaos and so jeopardize the best that women could hope for in her day: the freedom to become fully educated, practice their religion, and marry (or not) according to their own judgment. Richard Steele's periodical the *Tatler* satirized Astell as "Madonella" because she seemed to recommend women to a nunlike, "recluse life." But at the same time thinkers, both male and female, began to advocate improving women's education as part of a wider commitment to enhancing and extending sociability. Periodicals like the *Tatler*, the *Spectator*, and Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator* sought to teach as large a readership as possible to think and behave politely. All the while, women had to navigate a world structured by both what Egerton called "tyrant Custom" and these new ideas, by marriage laws that took away their agency but also by a certain freedom of movement enabled by a commercialized urban society: some women experimented with gender identities, and many cultivated intense friendships with other women. (See "Women, Gender, Power," [p. 743](#).)

Understandings of individuality—and human fellowship—were made all the more pressing as encounters with hitherto little-known societies in Asia, Africa, and the Americas enlarged Europeans' understanding of human norms as well. In *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift shows the comical, painful ways in which the discovery of new cultures forces one average Briton to reexamine his own. Across the period's literature, writers imagined themselves into personas from far-away places as they critiqued British behavior at home and abroad. Human difference also became a pressing philosophical

problem. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Adam Smith worked to develop an understanding of the stages of civilization: according to these writers, all cultures move from more “primitive” stages involving hunting and pasturage toward agriculture and eventually the kind of cultural and technological refinement eighteenth-century writers imagined their own commercial societies to possess. British thinkers thus treated geographical differences as temporal ones: people *elsewhere* were imagined as stuck in an *earlier*, less developed or more primitive stage of civilization. These ideas were debated alongside various climate theories and biological understandings of race, as British thinkers tried to understand how to make sense of human differences. At the same time, British readers were fascinated by these differences and eager to read travelogues and translations that gave them a glimpse into the minds of people from other cultures. (See “Global Commerce and Empire,” [p. 323.](#))

Britons also pursued their fascination with the material world. Scientific discoveries increasingly found practical applications in industry, the arts, and even entertainment. By the late 1740s, as knowledge of electricity advanced, public experiments offered fashionable British crowds the opportunity to shock themselves. Birmingham became famous as a center where science and manufacturing were combining to change the world: in the early 1760s Matthew Boulton (1728–1809) established the most impressive factory of the age just outside town, producing vast quantities of pins, buckles, and buttons; in subsequent decades, his applications and manufacture of the new steam engine invented by Scotsman James Watt (1736–1819) helped build an industry to drive all others. Practical chemistry also led to industrial improvements: domestic porcelain production became established in the 1750s; and from the 1760s Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795) developed glazing, manufacturing, and marketing techniques that enabled British ceramics to compete with China for fashionable taste. Wedgwood and others answered an ever-increasing demand in Britain for beautiful objects. Artist William Hogarth satirized this appetite for finery: a chaotic collection of china figurines crowds the mantel in



Plate 2 of *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1743–45). Yet the images that made Hogarth famous would soon decorate English ceramic teapots and plates and be turned into porcelain figurines themselves.

An obsession with getting and spending coexisted in this moment with a fascination with feeling. Midcentury, the popularity of the “sentimental” located the bases of social conduct in instinctual feeling rather than divinely sanctioned moral codes. Religion itself, according to Laurence Sterne, might be a “Great Sensorium,” a sort of central nervous system that connects the feelings of all living creatures in one great benevolent soul. And people began to feel pleasure in the exercise of charity. The cult of sensibility fostered a philanthropy that led to social reforms seldom envisioned in earlier times—to the improvement of jails, the relief of imprisoned debtors, the establishment of foundling hospitals and of homes for penitent sex workers, and ultimately the abolition of the slave trade. It loosed a ready flow of sympathetic responses to the joys and sorrows of fellow human beings, but also an intense, sometimes limiting fixation on the feeling self. (See “Sentiment,” [p. 997](#).)

New forms of religious devotion sprang up. The evangelical revival known as Methodism began in the 1730s, led by three Oxford graduates: John Wesley, his brother Charles, and George Whitefield. The Methodists took their gospel to the common people, warning that all were sinners and damned unless they accepted “amazing grace,” salvation through faith. Often denied the privilege of preaching in village churches, evangelicals preached to thousands in barns or the open fields. The emotionalism of such revival meetings repelled the Anglican Church and the upper classes, who feared that the fury and zeal of the Puritan sects were returning. Methodism was sometimes related to madness; convinced that he was damned forever, the poet William Cowper broke down and became a recluse. But the religious awakening persisted and affected many clergymen and laymen within the establishment, who reanimated the church and promoted unworldliness and piety. Nor did the insistence of Methodists on faith over works as the way to salvation prevent them or their Anglican allies from fighting for social reforms like abolition.



Robert Dighton, *Mr. Deputy Dumpling and Family Enjoying a Summer Afternoon*, 1781. A family of the middling sort, the father self-important, the mother beaming, visit Bagnigge Wells, one of many resorts in London catering to specific classes.

---

Sentimentalism, Evangelicalism, and the pursuits of wealth and luxury in different ways all placed a new importance on individuals—the gratification of their tastes and ambitions or their yearning for personal encounters with each other or a personal God. Diary-keeping, elaborate letter-writing, and the novel also testified to the growing importance of the private, individual life. Few histories of kings or nations could rival Samuel Richardson’s novel *Clarissa* (1747–48) in length, popularity, or documentary detail: it was subtitled “The History of a Young Lady.” The older hierarchical system had tended to subordinate individuals to their social rank or station. In the eighteenth century that fixed system began to break down, and people’s sense of themselves began to change. By the end of the century many issues of politics and the law revolved around rights, not traditions. The modern individual had been invented; no product of the age is more enduring.

# CONDITIONS OF LITERARY PRODUCTION

Publishing boomed in eighteenth-century Britain, as the number of titles appearing annually and the periodicals printed in London and provincial towns dramatically increased. This expansion in part resulted from a loosening of legal restraints on printing. Through much of the previous three centuries, the government had licensed the texts deemed suitable for publication and refused to license those it wanted suppressed (a practice called “prior restraint”). After the Restoration, the Printing Act (1662) tightened licensing controls, though unlike his Stuart predecessors Charles II now shared this power with Parliament. But in 1695, during the reign of William III, the last in a series of printing acts was not renewed. Debate in Parliament on the matter was more practical than idealistic: it was argued that licensing hampered the printing trades and was ineffective at preventing obnoxious publications anyway, which could be better constrained after publication by enforcing laws against seditious libel, obscenity, and treason. As the two-party system consolidated, both Whigs and Tories seemed to realize that prepublication censorship could bite them when their own side happened to be out of power. Various governments attempted to revive licensing during political crises throughout the eighteenth century, but it was gone for good.

This did not end the legal liabilities, and the prosecutions, of authors. Daniel Defoe, for instance, was convicted of seditious libel and faced the pillory and jail for his satirical pamphlet “The Shortest Way with the Dissenters” (1702), which imitated High Church zeal so extravagantly that it provoked both the Tories and the Dissenters he had set about to defend. And licensing of the stage returned: irritated especially by Henry Fielding’s antigovernment play *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*, Robert Walpole pushed the Stage Licensing Act through Parliament in 1737, which authorized the Lord Chamberlain to license all plays and reduced the number of London theaters to two (Drury Lane and Covent Garden), closing

Fielding's New Theatre in the Haymarket and driving him to become a novelist. But despite such constraints, philosopher David Hume could begin his essay "Of the Liberty of the Press" (1741) by citing "the extreme liberty we enjoy in this country of communicating whatever we please to the public" as an internationally recognized commonplace. This freedom allowed eighteenth-century Britain to build an exemplary version of what historians have called "the public sphere": a cultural arena, free of direct government control, consisting of not just published comment on matters of national interest but also the public venues—coffeehouses, clubs, taverns—where readers circulated, discussed, and conceived responses to it. The first regular daily London newspaper, the *Daily Courant*, appeared in 1702; in 1731, the first magazine, the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The latter was followed both by imitations and by successful literary journals like the *Monthly Review* (1749) and the *Critical Review* (1756). Each audience attracted some periodical tailored to it, as with the *Female Tatler* (1709) and Haywood's the *Female Spectator* (1744–46).

After 1695, the legal status of printed matter became ambiguous, and in 1710 Parliament enacted the Statute of Anne—"An Act for the Encouragement of Learning by Vesting the Copies of Printed Books in the Authors or Purchasers of Such Copies"—the first copyright law in British history not tied to government approval of works' contents. Typically, these copyrights were held by booksellers, who operated much as publishers do today (in the eighteenth century, *publisher* referred to one who distributed books). A bookseller paid an author for a work's copyright and, after registering the work with the Stationers' Company for a fee, had the exclusive right for fourteen years to publish it; if alive when this term expired, he owned it another fourteen years. Payments to authors for copyright varied. Pope got £15 for the 1714 version of *The Rape of the Lock*, while Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* earned him £100. The Statute of Anne spurred the book trade by enhancing booksellers' control over works and hence their chance to profit by them. But the government soon introduced a new constraint. In 1712, the first Stamp Act put a tax on all newspapers, advertisements, paper, and pamphlets (effectively



any work under a hundred pages or so): all printed matter had to carry the stamp indicating the taxes had been paid. Stamp Acts were in effect throughout the century, and duties tended to increase when the government needed to raise money and rein in the press, as during the Seven Years' War in 1757.

But such constraints were not enough to hold back the publishing market, which began to sustain the first true professional class of authors in British literary history. The lower echelon of the profession was called "Grub Street," which was, as Johnson's *Dictionary* explains, "originally the name of a street in Moorfields in London, much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries, and temporary poems." The market increasingly motivated the literary elite too, and Johnson himself came to remark that "no man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money." As a young writer, he sold articles to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and many other men and women struggled to survive doing piecework for periodicals. The enhanced opportunity to sell their works on the open market meant that fewer authors needed to look to aristocratic patrons for support. But a new practice, publication by subscription, blended elements of patronage and literary capitalism and created the century's most spectacular authorial fortunes. Wealthy readers could subscribe to a work in progress, usually by agreeing to pay the author half in advance and half upon receipt of the book. Subscribers were rewarded with an edition more sumptuous than the common run and the appearance of their names in a list in the book's front pages. Major works by famous authors, such as Dryden's translation of Virgil (1697), generated the most subscription sales; the grandest success was Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad* (1715–20), which gained him about £5000; his *Odyssey* (1725–26) raised nearly that much. But smaller projects deemed to need special encouragement also sold by subscription, including many books of poetry by women, such as Mary Leapor's poems (1751).

Not all entered the literary market with equal advantages; and social class played a role in preparing authors for success. The better educated were better placed to be taken seriously: many eminent male writers, including Dryden, Locke, Addison, Swift, Hume,

Johnson, Burke—the list could go on and on—had at least some university education, either at Oxford or Cambridge or at Scottish or Irish universities, where attendance by members of the laboring classes was virtually nil. Also universities were officially closed to non-Anglican men. Some important writers attended the Dissenting academies that sprang up to fulfill Nonconformists' educational aspirations: Defoe went to an excellent one at Newington Green. A few celebrated authors such as Rochester and Fielding had aristocratic backgrounds, but many came from the "middle class," though those in this category show how heterogeneous it was. Pope, a Catholic, obtained his education privately, and his father was a linen wholesaler, but he eventually became intimate with earls and viscounts, whereas Richardson, who had a family background in trade and (as he said) "only common school-learning," was a successful printer before he became a novelist. Both were middle-class in a sense and made their own fortunes in eighteenth-century print culture, yet they inhabited vastly different social worlds.

Despite the general exclusion of the poor from education and other means of social advancement, some self-educated writers of the laboring classes fought their way into print. A few became celebrities, aided by the increasing popularity of the idea, famously expressed by Thomas Gray in his "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," that there must be unknown geniuses among the poor. Stephen Duck, an agricultural worker from Wiltshire, published his popular *Poems on Several Subjects* in 1730, which included "The Thresher's Labor"—he became known as the "Thresher Poet." Queen Caroline herself retained him to be keeper of her library in Richmond. Several authors of the "common sort" followed in Duck's wake, including Mary Collier, whose poem "The Woman's Labor: An Epistle to Mr. Duck" (1739) defended country women against charges of idleness. Apart from such visible successes, eighteenth-century print culture afforded work for many from lower socioeconomic levels, if not as authors, then as hawkers of newspapers on city streets and singers of political ballads (often illiterate women), bookbinders, papermakers, and printing-press workers. The vigor of the literary market demanded the labor of all classes.

As all women were barred from universities and faced innumerable other disadvantages and varieties of repression, the story of virtually every woman author in the period is one of self-education, courage, and extraordinary initiative. Yet women did publish widely for the first time in the period, and the examples that can be assembled are as diverse as they are impressive. During the Restoration and early eighteenth century, a few aristocratic women poets were hailed as marvelous exceptions: the poems of Katherine Philips, "the matchless Orinda," were published posthumously in 1667; and others, including Anne Finch, Anne Killigrew, and later Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, printed poems or circulated them in manuscript among fashionable circles. A more public sort of female authorship was more ambivalently received. Though Aphra Behn built a successful career in the theater and in print, her sexually frank works were sometimes denounced as unbecoming a woman. Many women writers of popular literature after her in the early eighteenth century assumed "scandalous" public roles. Delarivier Manley published transparent fictionalizations of the doings of the Whig nobility, including *The New Atalantis* (1709), while Eliza Haywood produced stories about seduction and sex (though her late works, including *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, 1751, courted a rising taste for morality). Defenders of high culture found it easy to denounce these women and their works as affronts to sexual decency and good literary taste: Pope's *Dunciad* (1728) awards Haywood as the prize in a pissing contest between scurrilous male booksellers. But still these women found enormous success—Haywood's salacious *Love in Excess* was as popular as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

Many women writers after midcentury were determined to be perceived as more moral than their predecessors. Around 1750, intellectual women established clubs of their own under the leadership of Elizabeth Vesey and Elizabeth Montagu, cousin to Lady Mary. Proclaiming a high religious and intellectual standard, these women came to be called "bluestockings" (after the inelegant worsted hose of an early member). The literary accomplishments of bluestockings ranged widely: in 1758 Elizabeth Carter published her

translation of the Greek philosopher Epictetus, while Hannah More won fame as a poet, abolitionist, and educational theorist. Some of the most considerable literary achievements of women after midcentury came in the novel, a form increasingly associated with women readers (though men read them too), often exploring the moral difficulties of young women approaching marriage. The satirical novel *The Female Quixote* (1752) by Charlotte Lennox describes one such heroine deluded by the extravagant romances she reads, while Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) unfolds the sexual and other dangers besetting its naive but good-hearted heroine.



Richard Samuel, ***Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo*** (*The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain*), 1778. A mythological depiction of some “bluestockings,” women who made outstanding contributions to British literature and culture after the mid-18th century. *Standing, left to right:*

Elizabeth Carter, Anna Barbauld, Elizabeth Sheridan, Hannah More, and Charlotte Lennox; *seated, left to right*: Angelica Kauffmann, Catharine Macaulay, Elizabeth Montagu, and Elizabeth Griffith.

---

Readers' abilities and inclinations to consume literature helped determine the volume and variety of published works. While historians disagree about exactly how the literacy rate changed in Britain through the early modern period, there is widespread consensus that by 1800 between 60 and 70 percent of adult men could read, in contrast to 25 percent in 1600. Because historians use the ability to sign one's name as an indicator of literacy, the evidence is even sketchier for women, who were less often parties to legal contracts: perhaps a third of women could read by the mid-eighteenth century. Reading was commoner among the relatively well-off than among the very poor, and among the latter, more prevalent in urban centers than the countryside. Cultural commentators throughout the century portrayed literacy as a good in itself: everyone in a Protestant country such as Britain, many thought, would benefit from direct access to the Bible and devotional works, and increasingly employers found literacy among servants and other laborers useful, especially those working in cities. Moral commentators did their best to steer inexperienced readers away from the frivolous and idle realm of popular imaginative literature, though literacy could not but give its new possessors freedom to explore their own tastes and inclinations.

Cost placed another limit on readership: few of the laboring classes would have disposable income to buy a cheap edition of Milton (around two shillings at midcentury) or even a copy of the *Gentleman's Magazine* (sixpence), let alone the spare time or sense of entitlement to peruse such things. Nonetheless, reading material was widely shared (Addison optimistically calculated "twenty readers to every paper" of the *Spectator*), and occasionally servants were given access to the libraries of their employers or the rich family of the neighborhood. In the 1740s, circulating libraries began to

emerge in cities and towns throughout Britain. Though the yearly fee they usually charged put them beyond the reach of the poor, these libraries gave the middle classes access to a wider array of books than they could afford to assemble on their own. Records of such libraries indicate that travels, histories, letters, and novels were most popular, though patrons borrowed many specialized, technical works as well. One fascinating index of change in the character of the reading public was the very look of words on the page. In the past, printers had rather capriciously capitalized many nouns—words as common as *Wood* or *Happiness*—and frequently italicized various words for emphasis. But around the middle of the eighteenth century, new conventions arose: initial capitals were increasingly reserved for proper names, and the use of italics was reduced. The modern, eighteenth-century reader had come to expect that all English writing, no matter how old or new, on any topic, in any genre, would be printed in the same consistent, uncluttered style. This is an innovation of the eighteenth-century culture of reading that immediately demonstrates its linkage to our own.

## POETIC PRINCIPLES

Eighteenth-century poetry is often described as “neoclassical,” sometimes “Augustan”—after classical writers like Virgil and Ovid who flourished during the reign of the first Roman emperor, Augustus Caesar (63 B.C.E.–14 C.E.). But calling eighteenth-century poems “Augustan” seems to accept as fact the highly strategic and self-conscious way that some period poets embraced a political analogy between post–Civil War England and Augustan Rome, hoping that Charles II would be a better Augustus or that the British Empire would flourish like the Roman one. The relation between classical models and the modern world was never taken for granted: it was precisely the thing many poets wanted to explore, often quite playfully. Indeed, “neoclassical” English literature aimed to be not only classical but *new*. Rochester and Dryden infused fresh life into Greek, Latin, and French models by drawing on the English literary traditions of variety, humor, and freewheeling fancy represented by Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Milton. Pope, John Gay, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote in forms like the mock-epic and mock-pastoral, where satire was pointed both at the values encoded in the classical form and at a contemporary world that did not share those values. Enslaved poet Phillis Wheatley self-consciously placed herself in a long learned tradition that stretched back to Virgil, but also to the Roman playwright Terence, from North Africa.

Poets also aimed to give pleasure to readers—to express passions that everyone could recognize in language that everyone could understand. Dryden, for instance, values poetry according to its power to move an audience. Thus Timotheus, in Dryden’s “Alexander’s Feast,” is not only a musician but an archetypal poet who can make Alexander tearful or loving or angry at will. Readers, in turn, were supposed to cooperate with authors through the exercise of their own imaginations, creating pictures in the mind. A phrase from Horace’s *Art of Poetry*, *ut pictura poesis* (“as in painting,

so in poetry”), was interpreted to mean that poetry ought to be a visual as well as verbal art. Pope’s “Eloisa to Abelard,” for instance, begins by picturing two rival female personifications: “heavenly-pensive Contemplation” and “ever-musing Melancholy” (in the older typographical style, the nouns were capitalized to indicate the personification). Readers were expected to *see* these figures: Contemplation, in the habit of a nun, whose eyes roll upward toward heaven; and the goddess Melancholy, in wings and drapery, who broods upon the darkness. These two competing visions fight for Eloisa’s soul throughout the poem, which we see entirely through her perspective. Eighteenth-century poetry asks readers to translate even abstract words into moving images in the mind’s eye.

What many poets tried to see and represent was *Nature*—a word of many meanings. For eighteenth-century poets, these meanings included Nature as the universal and permanent elements in human experience. External nature, the landscape, also attracted attention throughout the eighteenth century as a source of pleasure and an object of inquiry. But as Anne Finch muses on the landscape, in “A Nocturnal Reverie,” it is her own soul she discovers. Pope’s injunction to the critic, “First follow Nature,” has primarily *human* nature in view. Nature consists of the enduring, general truths that have been, are, and will be true for everyone in all times, everywhere. Hence the business of the poet, according to Johnson’s *Rasselas*, is “to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances . . . to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind.” Yet if human nature was held to be uniform, human beings were known to be infinitely varied. Pope praises Shakespeare’s characters as “Nature herself,” but continues that “every single character in Shakespeare is as much an individual as those in life itself; it is . . . impossible to find any two alike.” This indicates a characteristic eighteenth-century state of mind in which life assumes the form of a perpetual allegory and some abiding truth shines through each circumstance as it passes. The particular is already the general, in much eighteenth-century literature.



To study Nature was also to study the ancients. Nature and Homer, according to Pope, were the same; and both Pope and his readers applied Horace's satires on Rome to their own world, because Horace had expressed the perennial forms of life. Moreover, modern writers could learn from the ancients how to practice their craft. If a poem is an object to be made, the *poet* (a word derived from the Greek for "maker") must make the object to proper specifications. Thus poets were taught to plan their works in one of the classical "kinds" or genres—epic, tragedy, comedy, pastoral, satire, or ode—to choose a language appropriate to that genre, and to select the right style and tone and rhetorical figures. The rules of art, as Pope said, "are Nature methodized." At the same time, however, writers needed *wit*: quickness of mind, inventiveness, a knack for conceiving images and metaphors and for perceiving resemblances between things apparently unlike. Shakespeare had surpassed the ancients themselves in wit, and no one could deny that Pope was witty. Hence a major project of the age was to combine good method with wit, or judgment with fancy. Nature intended them to be one, and the role of judgment was not to suppress passion, energy, and originality but to make them more effective through discipline: "The winged courser, like a generous horse, / Shows most true mettle when you check his course."

The test of a poet's true mettle, or spirit, is language. William Wordsworth, in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), declared that he wrote "in a selection of the language really used by men," and he went on to attack eighteenth-century poets for their use of an artificial and stock "poetic diction." Many poets did employ a special language. It is characterized by personification, representing a thing or abstraction in human form, as when an "Ace of Hearts steps forth" or "Melancholy frowns"; by periphrasis (a roundabout way of avoiding homely words: "finny tribes" for *fish*, or "household feathery people" for *chickens*); by stock phrases such as "shining sword," "verdant mead," "bounding main," and "checkered shade"; by words used in their original Latin sense, such as "genial" and "horrid"; and by English sentences forced into Latin syntax ("Here

rests his head upon the lap of Earth / A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown," where *youth* is the subject of the verb *rests*). This language originated in the attempt of early modern poets to rival the elegant diction of Roman writers, and Milton depended on it to help him match his lofty theme in *Paradise Lost*. When used mechanically it could become a mannerism. But Thomas Gray contrives subtle, expressive effects from this diction and syntax, as in the ironic inflation of "Ode on the Death of a Favorite Cat" or a famous stanza from "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard":

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
Awaits alike the inevitable hour.  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

It is easy to misread the first sentence. What is the subject of *awaits*? The answer must be *hour* (the only available singular noun), which lurks at the end of the sentence, ready to spring a trap not only on the reader but on all those aristocratic, powerful, beautiful, wealthy people who forget that their hour will come. Moreover, the intricacy of that sentence sets off the simplicity of the next, which says the same thing with deadly directness. The artful mix in the "Elegy" of a special poetic language—a language that nobody speaks but that calls attention to the lush resources of language itself—with sentiments that everybody feels helps account for the poem's enduring popularity.

Versification also tests a poet's skill. The heroic couplet was brought to such perfection by Pope, Johnson thought, that "to attempt any further improvement of versification will be dangerous." Pope's couplets, in rhymed iambic pentameter, typically present a complete statement, closed by a punctuation mark. Within the binary system of these two lines, a world of distinctions can be compressed. The second line of the couplet might closely parallel the first in structure and meaning, for instance, or the two lines might antithetically play against each other. Similarly, because a slight

pause called a “caesura” often divides the typical pentameter line (“Know then thyself, presume not God to scan”), one part of the line can be made parallel with or antithetical to the other, or even to one part of the following line. An often quoted and parodied passage of Sir John Denham’s “Cooper’s Hill” (1642) illustrates these effects. The poem addresses the Thames and builds up a witty comparison between the flow of a river and the flow of verse (italics are added to highlight the terms compared):

O could I flow like thee, | and make thy stream

Parallelism: *My great example*, | as it is *my theme*!

Double balance: Though *deep*, yet *clear*, | though *gentle*, yet not  
*dull*,

Double balance: *Strong* without *rage*, | without *o’erflowing*, *full*.

Once Dryden and Pope had bound such passages more tightly together with alliteration and assonance, the typical metrical-rhetorical wit of the new age had been perfected. For most of the eighteenth century its only metrical rival was blank verse: iambic pentameter that does not rhyme and is not closed in couplets. Milton’s blank verse in *Paradise Lost* provided one model, and the dramatic blank verse of Shakespeare and Dryden provided another. This more expansive form appealed to poets who cared less for wit than for stories and thoughts with plenty of room to develop. Blank verse was favored as the best medium for descriptive and meditative poems, from James Thomson’s *The Seasons* (1726–30) to Cowper’s *The Task* (1785).

Ordinary people also wrote and read verse, and many of them did not know the classics. Only a minority of men, and very few women, had the chance to study Latin and Greek, but that did not keep a good many from playing with verse as a pastime or writing about their own lives. While the heroic couplet was being perfected, doggerel also thrived, and Milton’s blank verse was sometimes used to describe a drunk or an oyster. Burlesque and broad humor characterize much of the common run of eighteenth-century verse. As the audience for poetry became more diversified, so did the

subject matter. No readership was too small to address; Isaac Watts, and later Anna Laetitia Barbauld and William Blake, wrote songs for children. The rise of unconventional forms and topics of verse subverted an older poetic ideal: the Olympian art that only a handful of the elect could possibly master. The eighteenth century brought poetry down to earth. In the future, art that claimed to be high would have to find ways to distinguish itself from the low.

## RESTORATION LITERATURE, 1660–1700

Dryden brought England a *modern* literature between 1660 and 1700. He combined a cosmopolitan outlook on the latest European trends with some of the richness and variety he admired in Chaucer and Shakespeare. In most of the important contemporary forms—occasional verse, comedy, tragedy, heroic play, ode, satire, translation, and critical essay—both his example and his rules influenced others. As a critic, he spread the word that English literature, particularly his own, could vie with the best of the past. As a translator, he made such classics as Ovid and Virgil available to a wide public; for the first time, a large number of women and men without a formal education could feel included in the high literary world.

Restoration prose clearly indicated the desire to reach a new audience. The styles of John Donne's sermons, Milton's pamphlets, or Thomas Browne's treatises now seemed too elaborate and rhetorical for simple communication. By contrast, Samuel Pepys and Aphra Behn head straight to the point, informally and unself-consciously. The Royal Society asked its members to employ a plain, utilitarian prose style that spelled out scientific truths; according to this theory (which did not always correspond with practice), rhetorical flourishes and striking metaphors might be acceptable in poetry, which engaged the emotions, but had no place in rational discourse. The impact of scientific stylistic ideals can be felt in Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688). In other literature, the ideal prose style had the ease and poise of well-bred urbane conversation. This is a social prose for a sociable age.

Yet despite its broad appeal to the public, Restoration literature kept its ties to an aristocratic heroic ideal. The "fierce wars and faithful loves" of epic poems were expected to offer patterns of virtue for noble emulation. These ideals lived on in popular French prose romances and in Behn's *Oroonoko*. They were also expressed in heroic plays like those written by Dryden, which push to extremes

the conflict between love and honor in the hearts of impossibly valiant heroes and impossibly high-minded and attractive heroines.

But comedy was the real distinction of Restoration drama. The best plays of Sir George Etherege (*The Man of Mode*, 1676), William Wycherley (*The Country Wife*, 1675), Aphra Behn (*The Rover*, 1677), and William Congreve (*Love for Love*, 1695; *The Way of the World*, 1700) can still hold the stage today. These "comedies of manners" pick social behavior apart, exposing the nasty struggles for power among the upper classes, who use wit and manners as weapons. Human nature in these plays often conforms to the worst fears of Thomas Hobbes's pessimism: sensual, false-hearted, selfish characters prey on each other. The male hero lives for pleasure and for the money and women that he can conquer. The object of his game of sexual intrigue is a beautiful, witty, pleasure-loving, and emancipated lady, every bit his equal in the strategies of love. What makes the favored couple stand out is the true wit and well-bred grace with which they step through the minefield of the plot. But during the 1690s, "Societies for the Reformation of Manners" began to attack the blasphemy and obscenity they detected in such plays, and they sometimes brought offenders to trial. When Dryden died in 1700, new ideas about politeness and respectability were coming into being.

## EARLY EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE, 1700–1745

At the beginning of the eighteenth century a brilliant new group of writers emerged, many with a taste for satire: Swift, in *A Tale of a Tub* (1704); Pope, in *An Essay on Criticism* (1711); Montagu, in *Town Eclogues* (written 1715); and Addison and Steele, in the *Tatler* (1709–11) and *Spectator* (1711–12, 1714). Addison and Steele refined the form of the elegant periodical essay to comment on up-to-the-minute fashions and fads. And the period's finest poetic works often cast a strange light on modern times by viewing them through the screen of classical myths and classical forms. Thus Pope exposes the frivolity of fashionable London, in *The Rape of the Lock* (1714–17), through the incongruity of verse that casts the idle rich as epic heroes. Similarly, Montagu takes up the pastoral form, meant for the countryside, to deal with fashionable people in the cities, where values of "natural" and "pure" get refracted richly. Such incongruities are not entirely negative. They also provide a fresh perspective on things that had once seemed too low for poetry to notice—for instance, in *The Rape of the Lock*, a girl putting on her makeup. In this way a parallel with classical literature could show not only how far the modern world has fallen but also how fascinating and magical it is when seen with "quick, poetic eyes."

At the same time, a new mass and multiplicity of writings responded to the expanding commercial possibilities of print. An array of popular prose genres—news, thinly disguised political allegories, biographies of notorious criminals, travelogues, gossip, romantic tales—often blended facts and patently fictional elements, cemented by a rich lode of exaggeration, misrepresentations, and outright lies. Out of this matrix the modern novel would come to be born. Two early masters of such works were Eliza Haywood—who centered stories of women and desire in texts like *Love in Excess* (1719) and *Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze* (1725)—and Daniel Defoe, producing first-person accounts such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the

famous castaway, and *Moll Flanders* (1722), mistress of lowlife crime. Claims that such works present (as the “editor” of *Crusoe* says) “a just history of fact,” believed or not, sharpened the public’s eagerness for them. These writers show readers a world plausibly like the one they know, where ordinary people negotiate familiar, entangled problems of financial, emotional, or spiritual existence. Jane Barker, Mary Davys, and many others brought women’s work and daily lives as well as love affairs to fiction. Such stories were not only amusing but also served as models of conduct. Readers also eagerly embraced less probable and realistic kinds of fiction. *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*—which was first published in English in this period—proved wildly popular, firing its readers’ imaginations with its magical and fantastic tales.

The theater also began to change to appeal to a wider audience. The clergyman Jeremy Collier had taken Dryden, Wycherley, and Congreve to task in *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698), which spoke for the moral outrage of the pious middle classes. The comedy of manners was replaced by a new kind, later called “sentimental” not only because goodness triumphs over vice but also because it deals in high moral sentiments rather than witty dialogue and because the embarrassments of its heroines and heroes move the audience not to laughter but to tears. Virtue refuses to bow to aristocratic codes. In one crucial scene of Steele’s play *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), the hero would rather accept dishonor than fight a duel with a friend. Piety and middle-class values typify tragedies such as George Lillo’s *London Merchant* (1731). Later in the century the comedies of Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan proved that sentiment is not necessarily an enemy to wit and laughter. Larger and larger audiences responded to spectacles and special effects, and the emerging star system produced idolized actors and actresses, such as David Garrick and Sarah Siddons.

Despite the sociable impulses of much of the period’s writing, readers also craved less crowded, more meditative works. Since the seventeenth century, a common poetic theme had been the



pleasures of retirement, poems that invited the reader to dream about a retreat in the country or to meditate, like Finch, on scenery and the soul. But after 1726, when Thomson published *Winter*, the first of his cycle on the seasons, the poetry of natural description came into its own. A taste for nature's beauty found expression not only in verse but in the elaborate, cultivated art of landscape gardening, and finally in the cherished art of landscape painting in watercolor or oils (often illustrating Thomson's *The Seasons*). Many readers also learned to enjoy a thrilling pleasure or fear in the presence of the "sublime" in nature: rushing waters, wild prospects, and mountains shrouded in mist. Whether enthusiasts went to the landscape in search of God or merely of heightened sensations, they came back feeling that they had been touched by something beyond the life they knew, by something that could hardly be expressed. Tourists as well as poets roamed the countryside, frequently quoting verse as they gazed at some evocative scene.

## THE EMERGENCE OF NEW LITERARY THEMES AND MODES, 1740–85

When Matthew Arnold called the eighteenth century an “age of prose,” he meant to belittle its poetry, but he also stated a significant fact: great prose does dominate the age. Until the 1740s, poetry tended to set the standards of literature, but over the course of the century prose—and the novel especially—became increasingly powerful. Intellectual prose flourished, with the achievements of Johnson in the essay and literary criticism, of James Boswell in biography, of Hume in philosophy, of Burke in politics, of Edward Gibbon in history, of Sir Joshua Reynolds in aesthetics, of Gilbert White in natural history, and of Adam Smith in economics. Each of these authors is a master stylist, whose effort to express himself clearly and fully demands an art as carefully wrought as poetry. Forms of life writing also became important and exciting. Frances Burney’s novels were written in the form of personal letters, but she also kept a diary that glitteringly captured the rhythms of everyday life in London. Formerly enslaved writers like Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoana wrote autobiographies that recounted what was horrifying and what was redemptive in their life stories, and these first-person accounts became powerful forces in the movement to end slavery.

Johnson helped codify that language, not only with his writings but with the first great English *Dictionary* (1755). This work established him as a national man of letters, but his dominance also involved service to others. The *Dictionary* illustrates its definitions with more than 114,000 quotations from the best English writers, thus building a bridge from past to present usage; and Johnson’s essays, poems, and criticism also reflect his desire to preserve the lessons of the past. Yet he looks to the future as well, trying both to reach and to mold a nation of readers. If Johnson speaks for his age, one reason is his faith in common sense and the common reader. “By the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices,”

he wrote in the last of his *Lives of the Poets* (1781), "must be finally decided all claim to poetical honors."

No prose form better united availability to the common reader and seriousness of artistic purpose than the emerging novel. Like many writers of fiction earlier in the century, Samuel Richardson did not set out to entertain the public with an avowedly invented tale: he conceived *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) while compiling a little book of model letters. The letters grew into a story about a young servant who resists her master's base designs on her virtue until he gives up and marries her. The combination of a high moral tone with sexual titillation and a minute analysis of the heroine's emotions and state of mind proved irresistible to readers, in Britain and in Europe at large. Richardson topped *Pamela's* success with *Clarissa* (1747–48), another epistolary novel, which explored the conflict between the libertine Lovelace, an attractive and diabolical aristocrat, and the angelic Clarissa, a middle-class paragon who struggles to stay pure. The sympathy that readers felt for Clarissa was magnified by a host of sentimental novels, including Frances Sheridan's *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, or The New Heloise* (1761), and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771). Henry Fielding made his entrance into the novel by turning *Pamela* farcically upside down, offering instead the stories of the hypocritical *Shamela* (1741) and Pamela's brother *Joseph Andrews* (1742). Fielding's true model, however, is Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605–15), from which *Joseph Andrews* borrowed an ironic, antiromantic style; a plot of wandering around the countryside; and an idealistic central character (Parson Adams) who keeps mistaking appearances for reality. The ambition of writing what Fielding called "a comic epic-poem in prose" went still further in *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749). Crowded with incidents and comments on the state of England, the novel contrasts a good-natured, generous, wayward hero (who needs to learn prudence) with cold-hearted people who use moral codes and the law for their own selfish interests. This emphasis on instinctive virtue and vice, instead of Richardson's devotion to good principles, put off some respectable readers like Johnson. But Samuel Taylor Coleridge thought that *Tom*

*Jones* (along with *Oedipus Rex* and Jonson's *Alchemist*) was one of "the three most perfect plots ever planned." (See "The Rise of the Novel," [p. 669](#).)

Some poets continued in the tradition of the earlier eighteenth century, taking on the guise of the learned commentator as they engaged social and political issues. Other poets seemed interested in withdrawing from the public arena. To Gray, Collins, Mark Akenside, and the brothers Joseph and Thomas Warton, it seemed that the spirit of poetry might be dying, driven out by the spirit of prose, by uninspiring truth, by the end of superstitions that had once peopled the land with poetic fairies and demons. In an age barren of magic, they ask, where has poetry gone? That question haunts many poems, suffusing them with melancholy. Poets who muse in silence are never far from thoughts of death, and a morbid fascination with the grave preoccupies many at midcentury. Such an attitude has little in common with that of poets like Dryden and Pope, social beings who live in a crowded world and seldom confess their private feelings in public. Pope's *An Essay on Man* had taken a sunny view of providence; Edward Young's *The Complaint: or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1742–46), an immensely long poem in blank verse, is darkened by Christian fear of the life to come.

Often the melancholy poet, set apart from the world, yearns to be living in some other time and place. In his "Ode to Fancy" (1746), Joseph Warton associated "fancy" with visions in the wilderness and spontaneous passions; the true poet was no longer defined as a craftsman or maker but as a seer or nature's priest. "The public has seen all that art can do," William Shenstone wrote in 1761, welcoming James Macpherson's *Ossian*, "and they want the more striking efforts of wild, original, enthusiastic genius." Macpherson filled the bill. His sentimental epics, supposedly translated from an ancient Gaelic warrior-bard, won the hearts of readers around the world; Napoleon and Thomas Jefferson, for instance, both thought that *Ossian* was greater than Homer. Poets began to cultivate archaic language and antique forms.

A medieval revival spurred, also, the invention of the Gothic novel. Horace Walpole set *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), a dreamlike tale of terror, in a simulacrum of Strawberry Hill, his own tiny, pseudo-medieval castle, which helped revive a taste for Gothic architecture. Walpole created a mode of fiction that retains its popularity to the present day. In a typical Gothic romance, amid the glooms and secret passages of some remote castle, the laws of nightmare replace the laws of probability. Forbidden themes—incest, murder, necrophilia, atheism, and the torments of sexual desire—are allowed free play. Most such romances, like William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), revel in sensationalism and the grotesque. The Gothic vogue suggested that classical canons of taste—simplicity and harmonious balance—might count for less than the pleasures of fancy—intricate puzzles and a willful excess. But Gothicism also resulted in works, like Ann Radcliffe's, that temper romance with reality, as well as in serious novels of social purpose, like William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798); and Mary Shelley, the daughter of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, eventually composed a romantic nightmare, *Frankenstein* (1818), that continues to haunt our dreams.



Bertie Greatheed, ***Diego and Jaquez Frightened by the Giant Foot***, 1791. A scene from Horace Walpole's Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), showing servants terrified by the supernatural appearance of an oversize stone foot in the castle.

---

The century abounded in other remarkable experiments in fiction, anticipating many of the forms that novelists still use today. Tobias Smollett's picaresque *Roderick Random* (1748) and *Humphry Clinker* (1771) delight in coarse practical jokes, the freaks and strong odors of life. But the most *novel* novelist of the age was Laurence Sterne, a humorous, sentimental clergyman who loves to play tricks on his readers. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760–67) abandons clock time for psychological time, whimsically follows chance associations, interrupts its own stories, violates the conventions of print by putting [Chapters 18](#) and [19](#) after [Chapter 25](#), sneaks in double entendres, and seems ready to go on forever. Sterne's second masterpiece, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), gives us a narrator, Yorick, who cultivates his feelings so self-consciously and renders them in such convincing detail that we are unsure whether to laugh at or weep along with him. Such uncertainty helps us recognize that our sympathies are as volatile and ambiguous as those of Sterne's characters. As unique as Sterne's fictional world is, his interest in private life matched the concerns of the novel toward the end of the century: depictions of characters' intimate feelings dominated the tradition of domestic fiction that included Burney, Radcliffe, and, later, Maria Edgeworth, culminating in the masterworks of Jane Austen. The copious, acute, often ironic attention to details of private life by Richardson, Sterne, and Austen have continued to influence the novel profoundly through its subsequent history.

This period brought important changes to ideas about what literature is how it works, and what it should do. If the debates in eighteenth-century Britain helped shape our understanding of "English literature," however, in their own moment these ideas were

profoundly in flux, contested. The new modes of meditative feeling explored by eighteenth-century poets like Thomas Gray and Charlotte Smith were developed by poets at the beginning of the nineteenth century into a Romantic poetics. We today have inherited a set of post-Romantic assumptions about poetry and emotional expressivity that make other aspects of eighteenth-century poetry feel surprising: its willingness to engage big philosophical or political questions, its play with personifications, its exuberant and sometimes vicious satire. The novel as a form was developing in the eighteenth century too, but it developed through a series of daring experiments undertaken without knowledge of the conventions that now seem obvious to us: writers tried out fake travelogues, faux-oriental tales, sentimental scenes designed to make readers weep, even stories narrated from the point of view of objects (as in *The Adventures of a Black Coat . . . As Related by Itself*, 1750). In an era of flourishing ideas about individualism, writers forged individualistic literary genres like the autobiography, but also cultivated aesthetic effects like sublimity that made the individual feel small. These texts might not always conform to our expectations today about what literature is and does, but they are all the more illuminating and compelling for that.



# The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<p><b>1660</b> Samuel Pepys begins his diary</p>	<p><b>1660</b> Charles II restored to the throne. Reopening of the theaters</p> <p><b>1662</b> Act of Uniformity requires all clergy to obey the Church of England. Chartering of the Royal Society</p> <p><b>1664–66</b> Great Plague of London</p>
<p><b>1666</b> Margaret Cavendish, <i>The Blazing World</i></p>	<p><b>1666</b> Fire destroys the City of London</p>
<p><b>1667</b> John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i></p>	
<p><b>1668</b> John Dryden, <i>Essay of Dramatic Poesy</i></p>	<p><b>1668</b> Dryden becomes poet laureate</p> <p><b>1672</b> Royal African Company founded</p>

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	<b>1673</b> Test Act requires all officeholders to swear allegiance to Anglicanism
<b>1678</b> John Bunyan, <i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i> , part 1	<b>1678</b> The Popish Plot inflames anti-Catholic feeling
<b>1681</b> Dryden, <i>Absalom and Achitophel</i>	<b>1681</b> Charles II dissolves Parliament  <b>1685</b> Death of Charles II. James II, his Catholic brother, takes the throne
<b>1687</b> Sir Isaac Newton, <i>Principia Mathematica</i>	
<b>1688</b> Aphra Behn, <i>Oroonoko</i>	<b>1688</b> The Glorious Revolution. James II exiled and succeeded by his Protestant daughter, Mary, and her husband, William of Orange
<b>1690</b> John Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i>	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1700</b> William Congreve, <i>The Way of the World</i> . Mary Astell, <i>Some Reflections upon Marriage</i>	
	<b>1702</b> War of the Spanish Succession begins. Death of William III. Succession of Anne (Protestant daughter of James II)
<b>1704</b> Jonathan Swift, <i>A Tale of a Tub</i> . Newton, <i>Opticks</i>	
	<b>1707</b> Act of Union with Scotland  <b>1710</b> Tories take power
<b>1711</b> Alexander Pope, <i>An Essay on Criticism</i> . Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele, <i>Spectator</i> (1711–12, 1714)	
<b>1713</b> Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, <i>Miscellany Poems, on Several Occasions</i>	<b>1713</b> Treaty of Utrecht ends War of the Spanish Succession

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	<b>1714</b> Death of Anne. George I (great-grandson of James I) becomes the first Hanoverian king. Tory government replaced by Whigs
<b>1716</b> Lady Mary Wortley Montagu writes her letters from Turkey (1716–18)	
<b>1717</b> Pope, <i>The Rape of the Lock</i> (final version)	
<b>1719</b> Daniel Defoe, <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> . Eliza Haywood, <i>Love in Excess</i>	<b>1720</b> "South Sea Bubble" collapses <b>1721</b> Robert Walpole comes to power
<b>1726</b> Swift, <i>Gulliver's Travels</i>	
	<b>1727</b> George I dies. George II succeeds
<b>1728</b> John Gay, <i>The Beggar's Opera</i>	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1730</b> Stephen Duck, <i>The Thresher's Labor</i>	
<b>1733</b> Pope, <i>An Essay on Man</i>	
	<b>1737</b> Stage Licensing Act censors plays
<b>1740</b> Samuel Richardson, <i>Pamela</i>	
<b>1742</b> Henry Fielding, <i>Joseph Andrews</i>	<b>1742</b> Walpole resigns
<b>1743</b> Pope, <i>The Dunciad</i> (final version). William Hogarth, <i>Marriage A-la-Mode</i> (1743–45)	
<b>1746</b> William Collins, <i>Odes</i>	<b>1746</b> Charles Edward Stuart's defeat at Culloden ends the last Jacobite rebellion
<b>1747</b> Richardson, <i>Clarissa</i> (1747–48)	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1749</b> Fielding, <i>Tom Jones</i>	
<b>1751</b> Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"	<b>1751</b> Robert Clive seizes Arcot, the prelude to English control of India
<b>1752</b> Charlotte Lennox, <i>The Female Quixote</i>	
<b>1755</b> Samuel Johnson, <i>Dictionary</i>	<b>1756</b> Beginning of Seven Years' War  <b>1757</b> Victory in Battle of Plassey gives British control of Bengal
<b>1759</b> Johnson, <i>Rasselas</i> . Voltaire, <i>Candide</i>	<b>1759</b> James Wolfe's capture of Quebec ensures British control of Canada
<b>1760</b> Laurence Sterne, <i>Tristram Shandy</i> (1760–67)	<b>1760</b> George III succeeds to the throne
<b>1768</b> Sterne, <i>A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy</i>	<b>1768</b> Captain James Cook voyages to Australia and New Zealand

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<b>1773</b> Phillis Wheatley, <i>Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral</i>	<b>1772</b> <i>Somerset</i> decision declares slavery illegal in England
<b>1776</b> Adam Smith, <i>The Wealth of Nations</i>	<b>1775</b> American Revolution (1775–83). James Watt produces steam engines <b>1777</b> Vermont constitution first in North America to ban slavery
<b>1778</b> Frances Burney, <i>Evelina</i>	
<b>1779</b> Johnson, <i>Lives of the Poets</i> (1779–81)	<b>1780</b> Gordon Riots in London <b>1783</b> William Pitt becomes prime minister
<b>1785</b> William Cowper, <i>The Task</i>	
<b>1789</b> Olaudah Equiano, <i>The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano</i>	<b>1789</b> Captain and crew of British ship <i>Zong</i> massacre over 130 enslaved Africans by drowning

# **JOHN DRYDEN**

## **1631–1700**

Although John Dryden's parents seem to have sided with Parliament against the king, there is no evidence that the poet grew up in a strict Puritan family. His father, a country gentleman of moderate fortune, gave his son a gentleman's education at Westminster School, under the renowned Dr. Richard Busby, who used the rod as a pedagogical aid in imparting a sound knowledge of the learned languages and literatures to his charges (among others John Locke and Matthew Prior). From Westminster, Dryden went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he took his A.B. in 1654. His first important poem, "Heroic Stanzas" (1659), was written to commemorate the death of Cromwell. The next year, however, in "Astraea Redux," Dryden joined his countrymen in celebrating the return of Charles II to his throne. During the rest of his life Dryden was to remain entirely loyal to Charles and to his successor, James II.

Dryden is a commanding literary figure of the last four decades of the seventeenth century. An impressive range of aspects of the life of his times—political, religious, philosophical, artistic—finds expression somewhere in his writings. Dryden is the least personal of poets. He is not at all the solitary, subjective poet listening to the murmur of his own voice and preoccupied with his own feelings but rather a citizen of the world commenting publicly on matters of public concern.



From the beginning to the end of his literary career, Dryden's nondramatic poems are most typically occasional poems, which commemorate particular events of a public character—a coronation, a military victory, a death, or a political crisis. Such poems are social and often ceremonial, written not for the self but for the nation. Dryden's principal achievements in this form are the two poems on the king's return and his coronation; *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), which celebrates the English naval victory over the Dutch and the fortitude of the people of London and the king during the Great Fire, both events of that "year of wonder," 1666; the political poems; and poems celebrating holidays, such as "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day."

Between 1664 and 1681, however, Dryden was mainly a playwright. The newly chartered theaters needed a modern repertory, and he set out to supply one. Dryden wrote his plays, as he frankly confessed, to please his audiences, which were not heterogeneous like Shakespeare's but were largely drawn from the court and from people of fashion. In the style of the time, he produced rhymed heroic plays, in which noble heroes and heroines face incredibly difficult choices between love and honor; comedies, in which fashionable men and women engage in intrigue and bright repartee; and later, libretti for the newly introduced dramatic form, the opera. His one great tragedy, *All for Love* (produced 1677), in blank verse, adapts Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* to the unities of time, place, and action. As his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668) shows, Dryden had studied the works of the great playwrights of Greece and Rome, of the English Renaissance, and of contemporary France, seeking sound theoretical principles on which to construct the new drama that the age demanded. Indeed, his fine critical intelligence always supported his creative powers. His abilities as both poet and dramatist brought him to the attention of the king, who in 1668 made him poet laureate. Two years later the post of historiographer royal was added to the laureateship at a combined stipend of £200, enough money to live comfortably on.

Between 1678 and 1681, when he was nearing fifty, Dryden discovered his great gift for writing formal verse satire. A quarrel

with the playwright Thomas Shadwell prompted the mock-heroic "Mac Flecknoe," probably written in 1678 or 1679 but not published until 1682. Out of the stresses occasioned by the Popish Plot (1678) and its political aftermath came his major political satires, *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681–82), and "The Medal" (1682), his final attack on the villain of *Absalom and Achitophel*, the Earl of Shaftesbury.

The consideration of religious and political questions that the events of 1678–81 forced on Dryden brought a new seriousness to his mind and works. In 1682 he published *Religio Laici*, a poem in which he examined the grounds of his religious faith and defended the middle way of the Anglican Church against the rationalism of Deism on the one hand and the authoritarianism of Rome on the other. But he had moved closer to Rome than he perhaps realized when he wrote the poem. Charles II died in 1685 and was succeeded by his Catholic brother, James II. Within a year Dryden and his two sons converted to Catholicism. Though his enemies accused him of opportunism, he proved his sincerity by his steadfast loyalty to the Roman Church after James abdicated and the Protestant William and Mary came in; as a result he was to lose his offices and their much-needed stipends.

With a family to support, Dryden resumed writing plays and turned to translations to enhance his much-diminished income. In 1693 appeared his versions of Juvenal and Persius, with a long dedicatory epistle on satire; and in 1697, his greatest achievement in this mode, the works of Virgil. At the very end, two months before his death, came the *Fables Ancient and Modern*, prefaced by one of the finest of his critical essays and made up of translations from Ovid, Boccaccio, and Chaucer.

Dryden's foremost achievement was to bring the pleasures of literature to the ever-increasing reading public of Britain. As a critic and translator, he made many classics available to men and women who lacked a classical education. His canons of taste and theoretical principles would set the standard for the next generation. As a writer of prose, he helped establish a popular new style, shaped to the cadences of good conversation. Johnson praised its apparent

artlessness: "every word seems to drop by chance, though it falls into its proper place. Nothing is cold or languid; the whole is airy, animated, and vigorous . . . though all is easy, nothing is feeble; though all seems careless, there is nothing harsh." Although Dryden's plays went out of fashion, his poems did not. His satire inspired the most brilliant verse satirist of the next century, Alexander Pope, and the energy and variety of his metrics launched the long-standing vogue of heroic couplets. Dryden fashioned the couplet form into an instrument suitable for every sort of discourse, from the thrust and parry of quick logical argument to expressive feelings, rapid narrative, or forensic declamation. Dryden crafted his verse into a style that was lively, dignified, precise, and always musical—a flexible instrument of public speech. "By him we were taught *sapere et fari*, to think naturally and express forcibly," Johnson concluded. "What was said of Rome, adorned by Augustus, may be applied by an easy metaphor to English poetry embellished by Dryden, *lateritiam invenit, marmoream reliquit*, he found it brick, and he left it marble."

# ***From Annus Mirabilis***<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

## **[LONDON REBORN]**

845 Yet London, empress of the northern clime,  
By an high fate thou greatly didst expire;  
Great as the world's, which at the death of time  
Must fall, and rise a nobler frame by fire.<sup>2</sup>

850 As when some dire usurper Heaven provides,  
To scourge his country with a lawless sway:<sup>3</sup>  
His birth, perhaps, some petty village hides,  
And sets his cradle out of fortune's way:

Till fully ripe his swelling fate breaks out,  
And hurries him to mighty mischiefs on:  
855 His Prince, surprised at first, no ill could doubt,<sup>o</sup>  
And wants the power to meet it when 'tis  
known:

Such was the rise of this prodigious fire,  
Which in mean buildings first obscurely bred,  
From thence did soon to open streets aspire,  
860 And straight to palaces and temples spread.

\* \* \*

Me-thinks already, from this chymic<sup>o</sup> flame,  
I see a city of more precious mold:  
1170 Rich as the town which gives the Indies name,<sup>o</sup>  
With silver paved, and all divine with gold.

Already, laboring with a mighty fate,  
She shakes the rubbish from her mounting  
brow,  
And seems to have renewed her charter's date,  
1175 Which Heaven will to the death of time allow.

More great than human, now, and more August,<sup>4</sup>  
New deified she from her fires does rise:  
Her widening streets on new foundations trust,  
And, opening, into larger parts she flies.  
1180

Before, she like some shepherdess did show,  
Who sat to bathe her by a river's side:  
Not answering to her fame, but rude and low,  
Nor taught the beauteous arts of modern pride.

Now, like a Maiden Queen, she will behold,  
1185 From her high turrets, hourly suitors come:  
The East with incense, and the West with gold,  
Will stand, like suppliants, to receive her doom.<sup>o</sup>

The silver Thames, her own domestic flood,  
Shall bear her vessels like a sweeping train;  
1190 And often wind (as of his mistress proud)  
With longing eyes to meet her face again.

The wealthy Tagus,<sup>5</sup> and the wealthier Rhine,  
The glory of their towns no more shall boast;  
And Seine, that would with Belgian rivers join,<sup>6</sup>  
1195 Shall find her luster stained, and traffic lost.

The venturous merchant, who designed<sup>o</sup> more far,  
And touches on our hospitable shore,  
Charmed with the splendor of this northern star,  
1200 Shall here unlade him, and depart no more.

Our powerful navy shall no longer meet,  
The wealth of France or Holland to invade;  
The beauty of this Town, without a fleet,  
From all the world shall vindicate<sup>o</sup> her trade.

1205 And while this famed emporium we prepare,  
The British ocean shall such triumphs boast,  
That those who now disdain our trade to share,  
Shall rob like pirates on our wealthy coast.

1210 Already we have conquered half the war,  
And the less dangerous part is left behind:  
Our trouble now is but to make them dare,  
And not so great to vanquish as to find.

Thus to the eastern wealth through storms we go,  
But now, the Cape once doubled,<sup>o</sup> fear no  
more;  
1215 A constant trade-wind will securely blow,  
And gently lay us on the spicy shore.

## 1666 **Endnotes**

1667

- Note 1:  
The year 1666 was a “year of wonders” (*annus mirabilis*; Latin): war, plague, and the Great Fire of London. According to the enemies of Charles II, God was visiting His wrath on the English people to signify that the reign of an unholy king would soon come to an end. Dryden’s long “historical poem” *Annus Mirabilis*, written the same year, interprets the wonders differently: as trials sent by God to punish rebellious spirits and to bind the king and his people together. “Never had prince or people more mutual reason to love each other,” Dryden wrote, “if suffering for each other can endear affection.” Charles had endured rejection and exile, England had been torn by civil wars. Dryden views these sufferings as a covenant, a pledge of better times

to come. Out of Charles's troubles, he predicts in heroic stanzas modeled on Virgil, the king shall arise like a new Augustus, the ruler of a great empire, and out of fire, London shall arise like the phoenix, ready to take its place as trade center for the world, in the glory of a new Augustan age.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Dryden's footnote cites Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, which foretells that the world will be purged by fire. The Fire of London, which utterly consumed the central city, burned for four days, September 2–6. By September 10, Christopher Wren had already submitted a plan, much of it later adopted, for rebuilding the city on a grander scale. For a dramatic contemporary depiction of the event, see *The Great Fire of London*, 1666, in the color insert in this volume. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Probably a reference to Oliver Cromwell. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Augusta, the old name of London [*Dryden's note*]. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The river Tagus flows into the Atlantic at Lisbon. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: France and Holland (which then included Belgium) had made an alliance for trade, as well as war, against England. [Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *fear* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *alchemic, transmuting* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Mexico* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *judgment, decree* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intended to go* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *defend, protect* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sailed around* [Return to reference °](#)

## **Absalom and Achitophel**

In 1678 a dangerous crisis, both religious and political, threatened to undo the Restoration settlement and to precipitate England once again into civil war. The Popish Plot and its aftermath not only whipped up extreme anti-Catholic passions, but led between 1679 and 1681 to a bitter political struggle between Charles II (whose adherents came to be called Tories) and the Earl of Shaftesbury (whose followers were termed Whigs). The issues were nothing less than the prerogatives of the Crown and the possible exclusion of the king's Catholic brother, James, Duke of York, from his position as heir-presumptive to the throne. Charles's cool courage and brilliant, if unscrupulous, political genius saved the throne for his brother and gave at least temporary peace to his people.

Charles was a Catholic at heart—he received the last rites of that church on his deathbed—and was eager to do what he could do discreetly for the relief of his Catholic subjects, who suffered severe civil and religious disabilities imposed by their numerically superior Protestant compatriots. James openly professed the Catholic religion, an awkward fact politically, for he was next in line of succession because Charles had no legitimate children. The household of the duke, as well as that of Charles's neglected queen, Catherine of Braganza, inevitably became the center of Catholic life and intrigue at court and consequently of Protestant prejudice and suspicion.

No one understood, however, that the situation was explosive until 1678, when Titus Oates (a renegade Catholic convert of infamous character) offered sworn testimony of the existence of a Jesuit plot to assassinate the king, burn London, massacre Protestants, and reestablish the Roman Church.

The country might have kept its head and come to realize (what no historian has doubted) that Oates and his confederates were perjured rascals, as Charles himself quickly perceived. But panic was created by the discovery of the body of a prominent London justice of the peace, Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, who a few days before had received for safekeeping a copy of Oates's testimony. The murder, immediately ascribed to the Catholics, has never been solved. Fear



and indignation reached a hysterical pitch when the seizure of the papers of the Duke of York's secretary revealed that he had been in correspondence with the confessor of Louis XIV regarding the reestablishment of the Roman Church in England. Before the terror subsided many innocent men were executed on the increasingly bold and always false evidence of Oates and his accomplices.

The Earl of Shaftesbury, the Duke of Buckingham, and others quickly took advantage of the situation. With the support of the Commons and the City of London, they moved to exclude the Duke of York from the succession. Between 1679 and 1681 Charles and Shaftesbury were engaged in a mighty struggle. The Whigs found a candidate of their own in the king's favorite illegitimate son, the handsome and engaging Duke of Monmouth, whom they advanced as a proper successor to his father. They urged Charles to legitimize him, and when he refused, they whispered that there was proof that the king had secretly married Monmouth's mother. The young man allowed himself to be used against his father. He was sent on a triumphant progress through western England, where he was enthusiastically received. Twice an Exclusion Bill nearly passed both houses. But by early 1681 Charles had secured his own position by secretly accepting from Louis XIV a three-year subsidy that made him independent of Parliament, which had tried to force his hand by refusing to vote him funds. He summoned Parliament to meet at Oxford in the spring of 1681, and a few moments after the Commons had passed the Exclusion Bill, in a bold stroke he abruptly dissolved Parliament, which never met again during his reign. Already, as Charles was aware, a reaction had set in against the violence of the Whigs. In midsummer, when he felt it safe to move against his enemies, Shaftesbury was sent to the Tower of London, charged with high treason. In November, the grand jury, packed with Whigs, threw out the indictment, and the earl was free, but his power was broken, and he lived only two more years.

Shortly before the grand jury acted, Dryden published anonymously the first part of *Absalom and Achitophel*, apparently hoping to influence their verdict. The issues in question were grave;

the chief actors, the most important men in the realm. Dryden, therefore, could not use burlesque and caricature as had Butler, or the mock heroic, as he himself had done in "Mac Flecknoe." Only a heroic style and manner were appropriate to his weighty material, and the poem is most original in its blending of the heroic and the satiric. Dryden's task called for all his tact and literary skill; he had to mention, but to gloss over, the king's faults: his indolence and love of pleasure; his neglect of his wife; and his devotion to his mistresses—conduct that had left him with many children, but no heir except his Catholic brother. He had to deal gently with Monmouth, whom Charles still loved. And he had to present, or appear to present, the king's case objectively.

The remarkable parallels between the rebellion of Absalom against his father, King David (2 Samuel 13–18), had already been noticed in sermons, satires, and pamphlets. Dryden took the hint and gave contemporary events a due distance and additional dignity by approaching them indirectly through their biblical analogues. The poem is famous for its brilliant portraits of the king's enemies and friends, but equally admirable are the temptation scene (which, like other passages, is indebted to Milton's *Paradise Lost*) and the exceptionally astute analysis of the Popish Plot itself.

A second part of *Absalom and Achitophel* (not included here) appeared in 1682. Most of it is the work of Nahum Tate, but lines 310–509, which include the devastating portraits of Doeg and Og (two Whig poets, Elkanah Settle and Thomas Shadwell), are certainly by Dryden.

## Absalom and Achitophel: A Poem

In pious times, ere priestcraft<sup>1</sup> did begin,  
Before polygamy was made a sin;  
When man on many multiplied his kind,  
Ere one to one was cursedly confined;  
5 When nature prompted and no law denied  
Promiscuous use of concubine and bride;  
Then Israel's monarch after Heaven's own heart,<sup>2</sup>  
His vigorous warmth did variously impart  
To wives and slaves; and, wide as his command,  
10 Scattered his Maker's image through the land.  
Michal,<sup>3</sup> of royal blood, the crown did wear,  
A soil ungrateful to the tiller's care:  
Not so the rest; for several mothers bore  
To godlike David several sons before.  
15 But since like slaves his bed they did ascend,  
No true succession could their seed attend.  
Of all this numerous progeny was none  
So beautiful, so brave, as Absalom:<sup>4</sup>  
Whether, inspired by some diviner lust,  
20 His father got him with a greater gust,<sup>o</sup>  
Or that his conscious destiny made way,  
By manly beauty, to imperial sway.  
Early in foreign fields he won renown,  
With kings and states allied to Israel's crown:<sup>5</sup>  
25 In peace the thoughts of war he could remove,  
And seemed as he were only born for love.  
Whate'er he did, was done with so much ease,  
In him alone 'twas natural to please;  
His motions all accompanied with grace;  
30 And paradise was opened in his face.

With secret joy indulgent David viewed  
His youthful image in his son renewed:  
To all his wishes nothing he denied;  
And made the charming Annabel<sup>6</sup> his bride.  
What faults he had (for who from faults is free?)  
35 His father could not, or he would not see.  
Some warm excesses which the law forbore,  
Were construed youth that purged by boiling o'er:  
And Amnon's murder,<sup>7</sup> by a specious name,  
Was called a just revenge for injured fame.  
40 Thus praised and loved the noble youth remained,  
While David, undisturbed, in Sion<sup>o</sup> reigned.  
But life can never be sincerely<sup>o</sup> blest;  
Heaven punishes the bad, and proves<sup>o</sup> the best.  
The Jews,<sup>o</sup> a headstrong, moody, murmuring race,  
45 As ever tried the extent and stretch of grace;  
God's pampered people, whom, debauched with  
ease,  
No king could govern, nor no God could please  
(Gods they had tried of every shape and size  
That god-smiths could produce, or priests devise);<sup>8</sup>  
50 These Adam-wits, too fortunately free,  
Began to dream they wanted liberty;<sup>9</sup>  
And when no rule, no precedent was found,  
Of men by laws less circumscribed and bound,  
They led their wild desires to woods and caves,  
55 And thought that all but savages were slaves.  
They who, when Saul<sup>1</sup> was dead, without a blow,  
Made foolish Ishbosheth<sup>2</sup> the crown forgo;  
Who banished David did from Hebron<sup>3</sup> bring,  
And with a general shout proclaimed him king:  
60 Those very Jews, who, at their very best,  
Their humor<sup>o</sup> more than loyalty expressed,  
Now wondered why so long they had obeyed  
An idol monarch, which their hands had made;

65      Thought they might ruin him they could create,  
Or melt him to that golden calf,<sup>4</sup> a state.<sub>o</sub>  
But these were random bolts;<sub>o</sub> no formed design  
Nor interest made the factious crowd to join:  
The sober part of Israel, free from stain,  
Well knew the value of a peaceful reign;  
70      And, looking backward with a wise affright,  
Saw seams of wounds, dishonest<sub>o</sub> to the sight:  
In contemplation of whose ugly scars  
They cursed the memory of civil wars.  
The moderate sort of men, thus qualified,<sub>o</sub>  
75      Inclined the balance to the better side;  
And David's mildness managed it so well,  
The bad found no occasion to rebel.  
But when to sin our biased<sup>5</sup> nature leans,  
The careful Devil is still at hand with means;  
80      And providently pimps for ill desires:  
The Good Old Cause<sup>6</sup> revived, a plot requires.  
Plots, true or false, are necessary things,  
To raise up commonwealths and ruin kings.  
    The inhabitants of old Jerusalem  
85      Were Jebusites;<sup>7</sup> the town so called from them;  
And theirs the native right.  
But when the chosen people<sub>o</sub> grew more strong,  
The rightful cause at length became the wrong;  
And every loss the men of Jebus bore,  
90      They still were thought God's enemies the more.  
Thus worn and weakened, well or ill content,  
Submit they must to David's government:  
Impoverished and deprived of all command,  
Their taxes doubled as they lost their land;  
95      And, what was harder yet to flesh and blood,  
Their gods disgraced, and burnt like common wood.<sup>8</sup>  
This set the heathen priesthood<sub>o</sub> in a flame;  
For priests of all religions are the same:

100 Of whatsoe'er descent their godhead be,  
Stock, stone, or other homely pedigree,  
In his defense his servants are as bold,  
As if he had been born of beaten gold.  
The Jewish rabbins,<sup>o</sup> though their enemies,  
105 In this conclude them honest men and wise:  
For 'twas their duty, all the learned think,  
To espouse his cause, by whom they eat and drink.  
From hence began that Plot, the nation's curse,  
Bad in itself, but represented worse;  
110 Raised in extremes, and in extremes decried;  
With oaths affirmed, with dying vows denied;  
Not weighed or winnowed by the multitude;  
But swallowed in the mass, unchewed and crude.  
Some truth there was, but dashed<sup>o</sup> and brewed with  
lies,  
115 To please the fools, and puzzle all the wise.  
Succeeding times did equal folly call,  
Believing nothing, or believing all.  
The Egyptian<sup>9</sup> rites the Jebusites embraced,  
Where gods were recommended by their taste.<sup>1</sup>  
Such savory deities must needs be good,  
120 As served at once for worship and for food.  
By force they could not introduce these gods,  
For ten to one in former days was odds;  
So fraud was used (the sacrificer's trade):  
Fools are more hard to conquer than persuade.  
125 Their busy teachers mingled with the Jews,  
And raked for converts even the court and stews:<sup>o</sup>  
Which Hebrew priests the more unkindly took,  
Because the fleece accompanies the flock.<sup>2</sup>  
Some thought they God's anointed<sup>o</sup> meant to slay  
130 By guns, invented since full many a day:  
Our author swears it not; but who can know  
How far the Devil and Jebusites may go?

This Plot, which failed for want of common sense,  
 Had yet a deep and dangerous consequence:  
 135 For, as when raging fevers boil the blood,  
 The standing lake soon floats into a flood,  
 And every hostile humor,<sup>3</sup> which before  
 Slept quiet in its channels, bubbles o'er;  
 So several factions from this first ferment  
 140 Work up to foam, and threat the government.  
 Some by their friends, more by themselves thought  
 wise,  
 Opposed the power to which they could not rise.  
 Some had in courts been great, and thrown from  
 thence,  
 Like fiends were hardened in impenitence;  
 145 Some, by their monarch's fatal mercy, grown  
 From pardoned rebels kinsmen to the throne,  
 Were raised in power and public office high;  
 Strong bands, if bands ungrateful men could tie.  
 Of these the false Achitophel<sup>4</sup> was first;  
 150 A name to all succeeding ages cursed:  
 For close designs, and crooked counsels fit;  
 Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit;<sup>o</sup>  
 Restless, unfixed in principles and place;  
 In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace:  
 155 A fiery soul, which, working out its way,  
 Fretted the pygmy body to decay,  
 And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.<sup>5</sup> }  
 A daring pilot in extremity;  
 Pleased with the danger, when the waves went high,  
 160 He sought the storms; but, for a calm unfit,  
 Would steer too nigh the sands, to boast his wit.  
 Great wits<sup>o</sup> are sure to madness near allied,<sup>6</sup>  
 And thin partitions do their bounds divide;  
 Else why should he, with wealth and honor blest,  
 165 Refuse his age the needful hours of rest?

Punish a body which he could not please;  
 Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease?  
 And all to leave what with his toil he won,  
 To that unfeathered two-legged thing,<sup>7</sup> a son;  
 170 Got, while his soul did huddled<sup>o</sup> notions try;  
 And born a shapeless lump, like anarchy.  
 In friendship false, implacable in hate,  
 Resolved to ruin or to rule the state.  
 To compass this the triple bond<sup>8</sup> he broke, }  
 175 The pillars of the public safety shook,  
 And fitted Israel for a foreign yoke;  
 Then seized with fear, yet still affecting  
     fame,  
 Usurped a patriot's all-atoning name.  
 So easy still it proves in factious times,  
 180 With public zeal to cancel private crimes.  
 How safe is treason, and how sacred ill,  
 Where none can sin against the people's will!  
 Where crowds can wink, and no offense be known,  
 Since in another's guilt they find their own!  
 185 Yet fame deserved, no enemy can grudge;  
 The statesman we abhor, but praise the judge.  
 In Israel's courts ne'er sat an Abbethdin<sup>9</sup>  
 With more discerning eyes, or hands more clean;  
 Unbribed, unsought, the wretched to redress;  
 190 Swift of dispatch, and easy of access.  
 Oh, had he been content to serve the crown,  
 With virtues only proper to the gown<sup>o</sup>  
 Or had the rankness of the soil been freed  
 From cockle,<sup>o</sup> that oppressed the noble seed;  
 195 David for him his tuneful harp had strung,  
 And Heaven had wanted one immortal song.<sup>1</sup>  
 But wild Ambition loves to slide, not stand,  
 And Fortune's ice prefers to Virtue's land.  
 Achitophel, grown weary to possess



200 A lawful fame, and lazy happiness,  
Disdained the golden fruit to gather free,  
And lent the crowd his arm to shake the tree.  
Now, manifest of<sup>o</sup> crimes contrived long since,  
He stood at bold defiance with his prince;  
205 Held up the buckler of the people's cause  
Against the crown, and skulked behind the laws.  
The wished occasion of the Plot he takes;  
Some circumstances finds, but more he makes.  
By buzzing emissaries fills the ears  
210 Of listening crowds with jealousies<sup>o</sup> and fears  
Of arbitrary counsels brought to light,  
And proves the king himself a Jebusite.  
Weak arguments! which yet he knew full well  
Were strong with people easy to rebel.  
215 For, governed by the moon, the giddy Jews  
Tread the same track when she the prime renews;  
And once in twenty years, their scribes record,<sup>2</sup>  
By natural instinct they change their lord.  
Achitophel still wants a chief, and none  
220 Was found so fit as warlike Absalom:  
Not that he wished his greatness to create  
(For politicians neither love nor hate),  
But, for he knew his title not allowed,  
Would keep him still depending on the crowd,  
225 That<sup>o</sup> kingly power, thus ebbing out, might be  
Drawn to the dregs of a democracy.<sup>3</sup>  
Him he attempts with studied arts to please,  
And sheds his venom in such words as these:  
"Auspicious prince, at whose nativity  
230 Some royal planet<sup>4</sup> ruled the southern sky;  
Thy longing country's darling and desire;  
Their cloudy pillar and their guardian fire:  
Their second Moses, whose extended wand  
Divides the seas, and shows the promised land;<sup>5</sup>  
235

Whose dawning day in every distant age  
Has exercised the sacred prophet's rage:  
The people's prayer, the glad diviners' theme,  
The young men's vision, and the old men's dream!<sup>6</sup>  
Thee, savior, thee, the nation's vows<sup>7</sup> confess,  
240 And, never satisfied with seeing, bless:  
Swift unespoken<sup>8</sup> pomps thy steps proclaim,  
And stammering babes are taught to lisp thy name.  
How long wilt thou the general joy detain,  
Starve and defraud the people of thy reign?  
245 Content ingloriously to pass thy days  
Like one of Virtue's fools that feeds on praise;  
Till thy fresh glories, which now shine so bright,  
Grow stale and tarnish with our daily sight.  
Believe me, royal youth, thy fruit must be  
250 Or gathered ripe, or rot upon the tree.  
Heaven has to all allotted, soon or late,  
Some lucky revolution of their fate;  
Whose motions if we watch and guide with skill  
(For human good depends on human will),  
255 Our Fortune rolls as from a smooth descent,  
And from the first impression takes the bent;  
But, if unseized, she glides away like wind,  
And leaves repenting Folly far behind.  
Now, now she meets you with a glorious prize,  
260 And spreads her locks before her as she flies.<sup>8</sup>  
Had thus old David, from whose loins you spring,  
Not dared, when Fortune called him, to be king,  
At Gath<sup>9</sup> an exile he might still remain,  
And heaven's anointing<sup>1</sup> oil had been in vain.  
265 Let his successful youth your hopes engage;  
But shun the example of declining age;  
Behold him setting in his western skies,  
The shadows lengthening as the vapors rise.  
He is not now, as when on Jordan's sand<sup>2</sup>

270 The joyful people thronged to see him land,  
 Covering the beach, and blackening all the  
 strand;  
 But, like the Prince of Angels, from his  
 height  
 Comes tumbling downward with diminished light;<sup>3</sup>  
 Betrayed by one poor plot to public scorn  
 275 (Our only blessing since his cursed return),  
 Those heaps of people which one sheaf did bind,  
 Blown off and scattered by a puff of wind.  
 What strength can he to your designs oppose,  
 Naked of friends, and round beset with foes?  
 280 If Pharaoh's<sup>4</sup> doubtful succor he should use,  
 A foreign aid would more incense the Jews:  
 Proud Egypt would dissembled friendship bring;  
 Foment the war, but not support the king:  
 Nor would the royal party e'er unite  
 285 With Pharaoh's arms to assist the Jebusite;  
 Or if they should, their interest soon would break,  
 And with such odious aid make David weak.  
 All sorts of men by my successful arts,  
 Abhorring kings, estrange their altered hearts  
 290 From David's rule: and 'tis the general cry,  
 'Religion, commonwealth, and liberty.'<sup>5</sup>  
 If you, as champion of the public good,  
 Add to their arms a chief of royal blood,  
 What may not Israel hope, and what applause  
 295 Might such a general gain by such a cause?  
 Not barren praise alone, that gaudy flower  
 Fair only to the sight, but solid power;  
 And nobler is a limited command,  
 Given by the love of all your native land,  
 300 Than a successive title,<sup>6</sup> long and dark,  
 Drawn from the moldy rolls of Noah's ark."  
 What cannot praise effect in mighty minds,

When flattery soothes, and when ambition blinds!  
Desire of power, on earth a vicious weed,  
305 Yet, sprung from high, is of celestial seed:  
In God 'tis glory; and when men aspire,  
'Tis but a spark too much of heavenly fire.  
The ambitious youth, too covetous of fame,  
310 Too full of angels' metal<sup>7</sup> in his frame,  
Unwarily was led from virtue's ways,  
Made drunk with honor, and debauched with praise.  
Half loath, and half consenting to the ill  
(For loyal blood within him struggled still),  
He thus replied: "And what pretense have I  
315 To take up arms for public liberty?  
My father governs with unquestioned right;  
The faith's defender, and mankind's delight,  
Good, gracious, just, observant of the laws:  
And heaven by wonders has espoused his cause.  
320 Whom has he wronged in all his peaceful reign?  
Who sues for justice to his throne in vain?  
What millions has he pardoned of his foes,  
Whom just revenge did to his wrath expose?  
Mild, easy, humble, studious of our good,  
325 Inclined to mercy, and averse from blood;  
If mildness ill with stubborn Israel suit,  
His crime is God's beloved attribute.  
What could he gain, his people to betray,  
Or change his right for arbitrary sway?  
330 Let haughty Pharaoh curse, with such a reign  
His fruitful Nile, and yoke a servile train.  
If David's rule Jerusalem displease,  
The Dog Star<sup>8</sup> heats their brains to this disease.  
Why then should I, encouraging the bad,  
335 Turn rebel and run popularly mad?  
Were he a tyrant, who, by lawless might  
Oppressed the Jews, and raised the Jebusite,

Well might I mourn; but nature's holy bands  
Would curb my spirits and restrain my hands:  
340 The people might assert<sup>o</sup> their liberty,  
But what was right in them were crime in me.  
His favor leaves me nothing to require;  
Prevents my wishes, and outruns desire.  
What more can I expect while David lives?  
345 All but his kingly diadem he gives:  
And that"—But there he paused; then sighing, said—  
"Is justly destined for a worthier head.  
For when my father from his toils shall rest  
And late augment the number of the blest,  
350 His lawful issue shall the throne ascend,  
Or the collateral line,<sup>9</sup> where that shall end.  
His brother, though oppressed with vulgar spite,<sup>1</sup>  
Yet dauntless, and secure of native right,  
Of every royal virtue stands possessed;  
355 Still dear to all the bravest and the best.  
His courage foes, his friends his truth proclaim;  
His loyalty the king, the world his fame.  
His mercy even the offending crowd will find,  
For sure he comes of a forgiving kind.<sup>2</sup>  
360 Why should I then repine at heaven's decree,  
Which gives me no pretense to royalty?  
Yet O that fate, propitiously inclined,  
Had raised my birth, or had debased my mind;  
To my large soul not all her treasure lent,  
365 And then betrayed it to a mean descent!  
I find, I find my mounting spirits bold,  
And David's part disdains my mother's mold.  
Why am I scanted by a niggard birth?<sup>3</sup>  
My soul disclaims the kindred of her earth;  
370 And, made for empire, whispers me within,  
'Desire of greatness is a godlike sin.' "  
Him staggering so when hell's dire agent found,

While fainting Virtue scarce maintained her ground,  
He pours fresh forces in, and thus replies:  
375 "The eternal god, supremely good and wise,  
Imparts not these prodigious gifts in vain:  
What wonders are reserved to bless your reign!  
Against your will, your arguments have shown,  
Such virtue's only given to guide a throne.  
380 Not that your father's mildness I contemn,  
But manly force becomes the diadem.  
'Tis true he grants the people all they crave;  
And more, perhaps, than subjects ought to have:  
For lavish grants suppose a monarch tame,  
385 And more his goodness than his wit<sup>o</sup> proclaim.  
But when should people strive their bonds to break,  
If not when kings are negligent or weak?  
Let him give on till he can give no more,  
The thrifty Sanhedrin<sup>4</sup> shall keep him poor;  
390 And every shekel which he can receive,  
Shall cost a limb of his prerogative.<sup>5</sup>  
To ply him with new plots shall be my care;  
Or plunge him deep in some expensive war;  
Which when his treasure can no more supply,  
395 He must, with the remains of kingship, buy.  
His faithful friends our jealousies and fears  
Call Jebusites, and Pharaoh's pensioners;  
Whom when our fury from his aid has torn,  
He shall be naked left to public scorn.  
400 The next successor, whom I fear and hate,  
My arts have made obnoxious to the state;  
Turned all his virtues to his overthrow,  
And gained our elders<sup>6</sup> to pronounce a foe.  
His right, for sums of necessary gold,  
405 Shall first be pawned, and afterward be sold;  
Till time shall ever-wanting David draw,  
To pass your doubtful title into law:

If not, the people have a right supreme  
To make their kings; for kings are made for them.  
410 All empire is no more than power in trust,  
Which, when resumed,<sup>o</sup> can be no longer just.  
Succession, for the general good designed,  
In its own wrong a nation cannot bind;  
If altering that the people can relieve,  
415 Better one suffer than a nation grieve.  
The Jews well know their power: ere Saul they  
chose,<sup>7</sup>  
God was their king, and God they durst depose.  
Urge now your piety,<sup>8</sup> your filial name,  
A father's right and fear of future fame;  
420 The public good, that universal call,  
To which even heaven submitted, answers all.  
Nor let his love enchant your generous mind;  
'Tis Nature's trick to propagate her kind.  
Our fond begetters, who would never die,  
425 Love but themselves in their posterity.  
Or let his kindness by the effects be tried,  
Or let him lay his vain pretense aside.  
God said he loved your father; could he bring  
A better proof than to anoint him king?  
430 It surely showed he loved the shepherd well,  
Who gave so fair a flock as Israel.  
Would David have you thought his darling son?  
What means he then, to alienate<sup>9</sup> the crown?  
The name of godly he may blush to bear:  
435 'Tis after God's own heart<sup>1</sup> to cheat his heir.  
He to his brother gives supreme command;  
To you a legacy of barren land,<sup>2</sup>  
Perhaps the old harp, on which he thrums his lays,  
Or some dull Hebrew ballad in your praise.  
440 Then the next heir, a prince severe and wise,  
Already looks on you with jealous eyes;

Sees through the thin disguises of your arts,  
And marks your progress in the people's hearts.  
Though now his mighty soul its grief contains,  
445 He meditates revenge who least complains;  
And, like a lion, slumbering in the way,  
Or sleep dissembling, while he waits his prey,  
His fearless foes within his distance draws,  
Constrains his roaring, and contracts his paws;  
450 Till at the last, his time for fury found,  
He shoots with sudden vengeance from the ground;  
The prostrate vulgar<sup>o</sup> passes o'er and spares,  
But with a lordly rage his hunters tears.  
Your case no tame expedients will afford:  
455 Resolve on death, or conquest by the sword,  
Which for no less a stake than life you draw;  
And self-defense is nature's eldest law.  
Leave the warm people no considering time;  
For then rebellion may be thought a crime.  
460 Prevail yourself of what occasion gives,  
But try your title while your father lives;  
And that your arms may have a fair pretense,<sup>o</sup>  
Proclaim you take them in the king's defense;  
Whose sacred life each minute would expose  
465 To plots, from seeming friends, and secret foes.  
And who can sound the depth of David's soul?  
Perhaps his fear his kindness may control.  
He fears his brother, though he loves his son,  
For plighted vows too late to be undone.  
470 If so, by force he wishes to be gained,  
Like women's lechery, to seem constrained.<sup>o</sup>  
Doubt not; but when he most affects the frown,  
Commit a pleasing rape upon the crown.  
Secure his person to secure your cause:  
475 They who possess the prince, possess the laws."  
He said, and this advice above the rest  
With Absalom's mild nature suited best:



Unblamed of life (ambition set aside),  
Not stained with cruelty, nor puffed with pride,  
480 How happy had he been, if destiny  
Had higher placed his birth, or not so high!  
His kingly virtues might have claimed a throne,  
And blest all other countries but his own.  
But charming greatness since so few refuse,  
485 'Tis juster to lament him than accuse.  
Strong were his hopes a rival to remove,  
With blandishments to gain the public love;  
To head the faction while their zeal was hot,  
And popularly prosecute the Plot.  
490 To further this, Achitophel unites  
The malcontents of all the Israelites;  
Whose differing parties he could wisely join,  
For several ends, to serve the same design:  
The best (and of the princes some were such),  
495 Who thought the power of monarchy too much;  
Mistaken men, and patriots in their hearts;  
Not wicked, but seduced by impious arts.  
By these the springs of property were bent,  
And wound so high, they cracked the government.  
500 The next for interest sought to embroil the state,  
To sell their duty at a dearer rate;  
And make their Jewish markets of the throne,  
Pretending public good, to serve their own.  
Others thought kings an useless heavy load,  
505 Who cost too much, and did too little good.  
These were for laying honest David by,  
On principles of pure good husbandry.<sup>o</sup>  
With them joined all the haranguers of the throng,  
That thought to get preferment by the tongue.  
510 Who follow next, a double danger bring,  
Not only hating David, but the king:  
The Solymaeen rout,<sup>3</sup> well-versed of old

In godly faction, and in treason bold;  
Cowering and quaking at a conqueror's sword,  
515 But lofty to a lawful prince restored;  
Saw with disdain an ethnic<sup>4</sup> plot begun,  
And scorned by Jebusites to be outdone.  
Hot Levites<sup>5</sup> headed these; who, pulled before  
From the ark, which in the Judges' days they bore,  
520 Resumed their cant, and with a zealous cry  
Pursued their old beloved theocracy:  
Where Sanhedrin and priest enslaved the nation,  
And justified their spoils by inspiration:  
For who so fit for reign as Aaron's race,<sup>6</sup>  
525 If once dominion they could found in grace?  
These led the pack; though not of surest scent,  
Yet deepest-mouthed<sup>7</sup> against the government.  
A numerous host of dreaming saints<sup>8</sup> succeed,  
Of the true old enthusiastic breed:  
530 'Gainst form and order they their power employ,  
Nothing to build, and all things to destroy.  
But far more numerous was the herd of such,  
Who think too little, and who talk too much.  
These out of mere instinct, they knew not why,  
535 Adored their fathers' God and property;  
And, by the same blind benefit of fate,  
The Devil and the Jebusite did hate:  
Born to be saved, even in their own despite,  
Because they could not help believing right.  
540 Such were the tools; but a whole Hydra more  
Remains, of sprouting heads too long to score.<sup>9</sup>  
Some of their chiefs were princes of the land:  
In the first rank of these did Zimri<sup>9</sup> stand;  
A man so various, that he seemed to be  
545 Not one, but all mankind's epitome:  
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;  
Was everything by starts, and nothing long;

But, in the course of one revolving moon,  
Was chymist,<sup>o</sup> fiddler, statesman, and buffoon:  
550 Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,  
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.  
Blest madman, who could every hour employ,  
With something new to wish, or to enjoy!  
Railing<sup>o</sup> and praising were his usual themes;  
555 And both (to show his judgment) in extremes:  
So over-violent, or over-civil,  
That every man, with him, was God or Devil.  
In squandering wealth was his peculiar art:  
Nothing went unrewarded but desert.  
560 Beggared by fools, whom still<sup>o</sup> he found<sup>o</sup> too late,  
He had his jest, and they had his estate.  
He laughed himself from court; then sought relief  
By forming parties, but could ne'er be chief;  
For, spite of him, the weight of business fell  
565 On Absalom and wise Achitophel:  
Thus, wicked but in will, of means bereft,  
He left not faction, but of that was left.  
Titles and names 'twere tedious to rehearse  
Of lords, below the dignity of verse.  
570 Wits, warriors, Commonwealth's men, were the best;  
Kind husbands, and mere nobles, all the rest.  
And therefore, in the name of dullness, be  
The well-hung Balaam and cold Caleb,<sup>1</sup> free;  
And canting Nadab<sup>2</sup> let oblivion damn,  
575 Who made new porridge for the paschal lamb.<sup>3</sup>  
Let friendship's holy band some names assure;  
Some their own worth, and some let scorn secure.  
Nor shall the rascal rabble here have place,  
Whom kings no titles gave, and God no grace:  
580 Not bull-faced Jonas,<sup>4</sup> who could statutes draw  
To mean rebellion, and make treason law.  
But he, though bad, is followed by a worse,

The wretch who heaven's anointed dared to curse:  
 Shimei,<sup>5</sup> whose youth did early promise bring  
 585 Of zeal to God and hatred to his king,  
 Did wisely from expensive sins refrain,  
 And never broke the Sabbath, but for gain;  
 Nor ever was he known an oath to vent,  
 Or curse, unless against the government.  
 590 Thus heaping wealth, by the most ready way  
 Among the Jews, which was to cheat and pray,  
 The city, to reward his pious hate  
 Against his master, chose him magistrate.  
 His hand a vane<sup>o</sup> of justice did uphold;  
 595 His neck was loaded with a chain of gold.  
 During his office, treason was no crime;  
 The sons of Belial<sup>6</sup> had a glorious time;  
 For Shimei, though not prodigal of pelf,<sup>o</sup>  
 Yet loved his wicked neighbor as himself.  
 600 When two or three were gathered to declaim  
 Against the monarch of Jerusalem,  
 Shimei was always in the midst of them;  
 And if they cursed the king when he was by,  
 Would rather curse than break good company.  
 605 If any durst his factious friends accuse,  
 He packed a jury of dissenting Jews;  
 Whose fellow-feeling in the godly cause  
 Would free the suffering saint from human laws.  
 For laws are only made to punish those  
 610 Who serve the king, and to protect his foes.  
 If any leisure time he had from power  
 (Because 'tis sin to misemploy an hour),  
 His business was, by writing, to persuade  
 That kings were useless, and a clog to trade;  
 615 And, that his noble style he might refine,  
 No Rechabite<sup>7</sup> more shunned the fumes of wine.  
 Chaste were his cellars, and his shrival board<sup>8</sup>

The grossness of a city feast abhorred:  
His cooks, with long disuse, their trade forgot;  
620 Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot,  
Such frugal virtue malice may accuse,  
But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews:  
For towns once burnt<sup>9</sup> such magistrates require  
As dare not tempt God's providence by fire.  
625 With spiritual food he fed his servants well,  
But free from flesh that made the Jews rebel;  
And Moses' laws he held in more account,  
For forty days of fasting in the mount.<sup>1</sup>  
To speak the rest, who better are forgot,  
630 Would tire a well-breathed witness of the Plot.  
Yet, Corah,<sup>2</sup> thou shalt from oblivion pass:  
Erect thyself, thou monumental brass,  
High as the serpent of thy metal made,<sup>3</sup>  
While nations stand secure beneath thy shade.  
635 What though his birth were base, yet comets rise  
From earthy vapors, ere they shine in skies.  
Prodigious actions may as well be done  
By weaver's issue,<sup>4</sup> as by prince's son.  
This arch-attestor for the public good  
640 By that one deed ennobles all his blood.  
Who ever asked the witnesses' high race  
Whose oath with martyrdom did Stephen<sup>5</sup> grace?  
Ours was a Levite, and as times went then,  
His tribe were God Almighty's gentlemen.  
645 Sunk were his eyes, his voice was harsh and loud,  
Sure signs he neither choleric<sup>o</sup> was nor proud:  
His long chin proved his wit; his saintlike grace  
A church vermilion, and a Moses' face.<sup>6</sup>  
His memory, miraculously great,  
650 Could plots, exceeding man's belief, repeat;  
Which therefore cannot be accounted lies,  
For human wit could never such devise.

Some future truths are mingled in his book;  
But where the witness failed, the prophet spoke:  
655 Some things like visionary flights appear;  
The spirit caught him up, the Lord knows where,  
And gave him his rabbinical degree,  
Unknown to foreign university.<sup>7</sup>  
His judgment yet his memory did excel;  
660 Which pieced his wondrous evidence so well,  
And suited to the temper of the times,  
Then groaning under Jebusitic crimes.  
Let Israel's foes suspect his heavenly call,  
And rashly judge his writ apocryphal;<sup>8</sup>  
665 Our laws for such affronts have forfeits made:  
He takes his life, who takes away his trade.  
Were I myself in witness Corah's place,  
The wretch who did me such a dire disgrace  
Should whet my memory, though once forgot,  
670 To make him an appendix of my plot.  
His zeal to heaven made him his prince despise,  
And load his person with indignities;  
But zeal peculiar privilege affords,  
Indulging latitude to deeds and words;  
675 And Corah might for Agag's<sup>9</sup> murder call,  
In terms as coarse as Samuel used to Saul.<sup>1</sup>  
What others in his evidence did join  
(The best that could be had for love or coin),  
In Corah's own predicament will fall;  
680 For *witness* is a common name to all.  
Surrounded thus with friends of every sort,  
Deluded Absalom forsakes the court:  
Impatient of high hopes, urged with renown,  
And fired with near possession of a crown.  
685 The admiring crowd are dazzled with surprise,  
And on his goodly person feed their eyes:  
His joy concealed, he sets himself to show,

On each side bowing popularly<sup>2</sup> low;  
 His looks, his gestures, and his words he frames,  
 690 And with familiar ease repeats their names.  
 Thus formed by nature, furnished out with arts,  
 He glides unfelt into their secret hearts.  
 Then, with a kind compassionating look,  
 And sighs, bespeaking pity ere he spoke,  
 695 Few words he said; but easy those and fit,  
 More slow than Hybla-drops,<sup>3</sup> and far more sweet.  
 "I mourn, my countrymen, your lost estate;  
 Though far unable to prevent your fate:  
 Behold a banished man, for your dear cause  
 700 Exposed a prey to arbitrary laws!  
 Yet oh! that I alone could be undone,  
 Cut off from empire, and no more a son!  
 Now all your liberties a spoil are made;  
 Egypt<sup>o</sup> and Tyrus<sup>o</sup> intercept your trade,  
 705 And Jebusites your sacred rites invade.  
 My father, whom with reverence yet I name,  
 Charmed into ease, is careless of his fame;  
 And, bribed with petty sums of foreign gold,  
 Is grown in Bathsheba's<sup>4</sup> embraces old;  
 710 Exalts his enemies, his friends destroys;  
 And all his power against himself employs.  
 He gives, and let him give, my right away;  
 But why should he his own, and yours betray?  
 He only, he can make the nation bleed,  
 715 And he alone from my revenge is freed.  
 Take then my tears (with that he wiped his eyes),  
 'Tis all the aid my present power supplies:  
 No court-informer can these arms accuse;  
 These arms may sons against their fathers use:  
 720 And 'tis my wish, the next successor's reign  
 May make no other Israelite complain."  
 Youth, beauty, graceful action seldom fail;

But common interest always will prevail;  
And pity never ceases to be shown  
725 To him who makes the people's wrongs his own.  
The crowd (that still believe their kings oppress)  
With lifted hands their young Messiah bless:  
Who now begins his progress to ordain  
With chariots, horsemen, and a numerous train;  
730 From east to west his glories he displays,<sup>5</sup>  
And, like the sun, the promised land surveys.  
Fame runs before him as the morning star,  
And shouts of joy salute him from afar:  
Each house receives him as a guardian god,  
735 And consecrates the place of his abode:  
But hospitable treats did most commend  
Wise Issachar,<sup>6</sup> his wealthy western friend.  
This moving court, that caught the people's eyes,  
And seemed but pomp, did other ends disguise:  
740 Achitophel had formed it, with intent  
To sound the depths, and fathom, where it went,  
The people's hearts; distinguish friends from foes,  
And try their strength, before they came to blows.  
Yet all was colored with a smooth pretense  
745 Of specious love, and duty to their prince.  
Religion, and redress of grievances,  
Two names that always cheat and always please,  
Are often urged; and good King David's life  
Endangered by a brother and a wife.<sup>7</sup>  
750 Thus, in a pageant show, a plot is made,  
And peace itself is war in masquerade.  
O foolish Israel! never warned by ill,  
Still the same bait, and circumvented still!  
Did ever men forsake their present ease,  
755 In midst of health imagine a disease;  
Take pains contingent mischiefs to foresee,  
Make heirs for monarchs, and for God decree?



What shall we think! Can people give away  
Both for themselves and sons, their native sway?  
760 Then they are left defenseless to the sword  
Of each unbounded, arbitrary lord:  
And laws are vain, by which we right enjoy,  
If kings unquestioned can those laws destroy.  
Yet if the crowd be judge of fit and just,  
765 And kings are only officers in trust,  
Then this resuming covenant was declared  
When kings were made, or is forever barred.  
If those who gave the scepter could not tie  
By their own deed their own posterity,  
770 How then could Adam bind his future race?  
How could his forfeit on mankind take place?  
Or how could heavenly justice damn us all,  
Who ne'er consented to our father's fall?  
Then kings are slaves to those whom they  
775       command,  
And tenants to their people's pleasure stand.  
Add, that the power for property allowed  
Is mischievously seated in the crowd;  
For who can be secure of private right,  
If sovereign sway may be dissolved by might?  
780 Nor is the people's judgment always true:  
The most may err as grossly as the few;  
And faultless kings run down, by common cry,  
For vice, oppression, and for tyranny.  
What standard is there in a fickle rout,  
785 Which, flowing to the mark,<sup>o</sup> runs faster out?  
Nor only crowds, but Sanhedrins may be  
Infected with this public lunacy,<sup>8</sup>  
And share the madness of rebellious times,  
To murder monarchs for imagined crimes.<sup>9</sup>  
790 If they may give and take whene'er they please,  
Not kings alone (the Godhead's images),

But government itself at length must fall  
To nature's state, where all have right to all.  
Yet, grant our lords the people kings can make,  
795 What prudent men a settled throne would shake?  
For whatsoe'er their sufferings were before,  
That change they covet makes them suffer more.  
All other errors but disturb a state,  
But innovation is the blow of fate.  
800 If ancient fabrics nod, and threat to fall,  
To patch the flaws, and buttress up the wall,  
Thus far 'tis duty; but here fix the mark;  
For all beyond it is to touch our ark.<sup>1</sup>  
To change foundations, cast the frame anew,  
805 Is work for rebels, who base ends pursue,  
At once divine and human laws control,  
And mend the parts by ruin of the whole.  
The tampering world is subject to this curse,  
To physic their disease into a worse.  
810 Now what relief can righteous David bring?  
How fatal 'tis to be too good a king!  
Friends he has few, so high the madness grows:  
Who dare be such, must be the people's foes:  
Yet some there were, even in the worst of days;  
815 Some let me name, and naming is to praise.  
In this short file Barzillai<sup>2</sup> first appears;  
Barzillai, crowned with honor and with years:  
Long since, the rising rebels he withstood  
In regions waste, beyond the Jordan's flood:  
820 Unfortunately brave to buoy the State;  
But sinking underneath his master's fate:  
In exile with his godlike prince he mourned;  
For him he suffered, and with him returned.  
The court he practiced, not the courtier's art:  
825 Large was his wealth, but larger was his heart:  
Which well the noblest objects knew to choose,

The fighting warrior, and recording Muse.  
 His bed could once a fruitful issue boast;  
 Now more than half a father's name is lost.  
 830 His eldest hope, <sup>3</sup> with every grace adorned,  
 By me (so Heaven will have it) always mourned,  
 And always honored, snatched in manhood's prime  
 By unequal fates, and Providence's crime:  
 835 Yet not before the goal of honor won,  
 All parts fulfilled of subject and of son;  
 Swift was the race, but short the time to  
 run. }  
 O narrow circle, but of power divine,  
 Scanted in space, but perfect in thy line!  
 By sea, by land, thy matchless worth was known,  
 840 Arms thy delight, and war was all thy own:  
 Thy force, infused, the fainting Tyrians<sup>o</sup> propped;  
 And haughty Pharaoh found his fortune stopped.  
 Oh ancient honor! Oh unconquered hand,  
 Whom foes unpunished never could withstand!  
 845 But Israel was unworthy of thy name:  
 Short is the date of all immoderate fame.  
 It looks as Heaven our ruin had designed,  
 And durst not trust thy fortune and thy mind.  
 Now, free from earth, thy disencumbered soul  
 850 Mounts up, and leaves behind the clouds and starry  
 pole:  
 From thence thy kindred legions mayst thou bring,  
 To aid the guardian angel of thy king.  
 Here stop my Muse, here cease thy painful flight;  
 No pinions can pursue immortal height:  
 855 Tell good Barzillai thou canst sing no more,  
 And tell thy soul she should have fled before:  
 Or fled she with his life, and left this verse  
 To hang on her departed patron's hearse?  
 Now take thy steepy flight from heaven, and see  
 860

If thou canst find on earth another *he*:  
Another *he* would be too hard to find;  
See then whom thou canst see not far behind.  
Zadoc<sup>4</sup> the priest, whom, shunning power and place,  
His lowly mind advanced to David's grace:  
865 With him the Sagan<sup>5</sup> of Jerusalem,  
Of hospitable soul, and noble stem;  
Him of the western dome,<sup>6</sup> whose weighty sense  
Flows in fit words and heavenly eloquence.  
The prophets' sons,<sup>7</sup> by such example led,  
870 To learning and to loyalty were bred:  
For colleges on bounteous kinds depend,  
And never rebel was to arts a friend.  
To these succeed the pillars of the laws,  
Who best could plead, and best can judge a cause.  
875 Next them a train of loyal peers ascend;  
Sharp-judging Adriel,<sup>8</sup> the Muses' friend,  
Himself a Muse—in Sanhedrin's debate  
True to his prince, but not a slave of state:  
Whom David's love with honors did adorn,  
880 That from his disobedient son were torn.  
Jotham<sup>9</sup> of piercing wit, and pregnant thought,  
Indued by nature, and by learning taught  
To move assemblies, who but only tried  
The worse a while, then chose the better side;  
885 Nor chose alone, but turned the balance too;  
So much the weight of one brave man can do.  
Hushar,<sup>1</sup> the friend of David in distress,  
In public storms, of manly steadfastness:  
By foreign treaties he informed his youth,  
890 And joined experience to his native truth.  
His frugal care supplied the wanting throne,  
Frugal for that, but bounteous of his own:  
'Tis easy conduct when exchequers flow,  
But hard the task to manage well the low;

895 For sovereign power is too depressed or high,  
 When kings are forced to sell, or crowds to buy.  
 Indulge one labor more, my weary Muse,  
 For Amiel:<sup>2</sup> who can Amiel's praise refuse?  
 Of ancient race by birth, but nobler yet  
 900 In his own worth, and without title great:  
 The Sanhedrin long time as chief he ruled,  
 Their reason guided, and their passion cooled:  
 So dexterous was he in the crown's defense,  
 So formed to speak a loyal nation's sense,  
 905 That, as their band was Israel's tribes in small,  
 So fit was he to represent them all.  
 Now rasher charioteers the seat ascend,  
 Whose loose careers his steady skill commend:<sup>o</sup>  
 They like the unequal ruler of the day,  
 910 Misguide the seasons, and mistake the way;  
 While he withdrawn at their mad labor smiles,  
 And safe enjoys the sabbath of his toils.  
 These were the chief, a small but faithful band  
 Of worthies, in the breach who dared to  
 915 stand, }  
 And tempt the united fury of the land. }  
 With grief they viewed such powerful  
 engines bent,  
 To batter down the lawful government:  
 A numerous faction, with pretended frights,  
 In Sanhedrins to plume<sup>o</sup> the regal rights;  
 920 The true successor from the court removed:<sup>3</sup>  
 The Plot, by hireling witnesses, improved.  
 These ills they saw, and, as their duty bound,  
 They showed the king the danger of the wound:  
 That no concessions from the throne would please,  
 925 But lenitives<sup>o</sup> fomented the disease;  
 That Absalom, ambitious of the crown,  
 Was made the lure to draw the people down;

That false Achitophel's pernicious hate  
Had turned the Plot to ruin Church and State:  
930 The council violent, the rabble worse;  
That Shimei taught Jerusalem to curse.  
With all these loads of injuries oppressed,  
And long revolving, in his careful breast,  
The event of things, at last, his patience tired,  
935 Thus from his royal throne, by Heaven inspired,  
The godlike David spoke: with awful fear  
His train their Maker in their master hear.  
"Thus long have I, by native mercy swayed,  
My wrongs dissembled, my revenge delayed:  
940 So willing to forgive the offending age,  
So much the father did the king assuage.  
But now so far my clemency they slight,  
The offenders question my forgiving right.  
That one was made for many, they contend;  
945 But 'tis to rule; for that's a monarch's end.  
They call my tenderness of blood, my fear;  
Though manly tempers can the longest bear.  
Yet, since they will divert my native course,  
'Tis time to show I am not good by force.  
950 Those heaped affronts that haughty subjects bring,  
Are burdens for a camel, not a king:  
Kings are the public pillars of the State,  
Born to sustain and prop the nation's weight:  
If my young Samson will pretend a call  
955 To shake the column, let him share the fall:<sup>4</sup>  
But, oh, that yet he would repent and live!  
How easy 'tis for parents to forgive!  
With how few tears a pardon might be won  
From nature, pleading for a darling son!  
960 Poor pitied youth, by my paternal care  
Raised up to all the height his frame could bear:  
Had God ordained his fate for empire born,

He would have given his soul another turn:  
Gulled<sup>o</sup> with a patriot's name, whose modern sense  
965 Is one that would by law supplant his prince:  
The people's brave,<sup>o</sup> the politician's tool;  
Never was patriot yet, but was a fool.  
Whence comes it that religion and the laws  
Should more be Absalom's than David's cause?  
970 His old instructor,<sup>5</sup> ere he lost his place,  
Was never thought indued with so much grace.  
Good heavens, how faction can a patriot paint!  
My rebel ever proves my people's saint:  
Would *they* impose an heir upon the throne?  
975 Let Sanhedrins be taught to give their own.<sup>o</sup>  
A king's at least a part of government,  
And mine as requisite as their consent;  
Without my leave a future king to choose,  
Infers a right the present to depose:  
980 True, they petition me to approve their choice;  
But Esau's hands suit ill with Jacob's voice.<sup>6</sup>  
My pious subjects for my safety pray,  
Which to secure, they take my power away.  
From plots and treasons Heaven preserve my years,  
985 But save me most from my petitioners.  
Unsate as the barren womb or grave;  
God cannot grant so much as they can crave.  
What then is left but with a jealous eye  
To guard the small remains of royalty?  
990 The law shall still direct my peaceful sway,  
And the same law teach rebels to obey:  
Votes shall no more established power control—  
Such votes as make a part exceed the whole:  
No groundless clamors shall my friends remove,  
995 Nor crowds have power to punish ere they prove:  
For gods and godlike kings, their care express,  
Still to defend their servants in distress.

O that my power to saving were confined:  
 Why am I forced, like Heaven, against my  
 1000 mind,  
 To make examples of another kind?  
 Must I at length the sword of justice draw?  
 O curst effects of necessary law!  
 How ill my fear they by my mercy scan!<sup>o</sup>  
 Beware the fury of a patient man.  
 1005 Law they require, let Law then show her face;  
 They could not be content to look on Grace,  
 Her hinder parts, but with a daring eye  
 To tempt the terror of her front and die.<sup>7</sup>  
 By their own arts, 'tis righteously decreed,  
 1010 Those dire artificers of death shall bleed.  
 Against themselves their witnesses will swear,  
 Till viper-like their mother Plot they tear:  
 And suck for nutriment that bloody gore,  
 Which was their principle of life before.  
 1015 Their Belial with their Belzebub<sup>8</sup> will fight;  
 Thus on my foes, my foes shall do me right:  
 Nor doubt the event; for factious crowds engage,  
 In their first onset, all their brutal rage.  
 Then let 'em take an unresisted course,  
 1020 Retire and traverse,<sup>o</sup> and delude their force:  
 But when they stand all breathless, urge the fight,  
 And rise upon 'em with redoubled might:  
 For lawful power is still superior found,  
 When long driven back, at length it stands the  
 1025 ground."  
 He said. The Almighty, nodding, gave consent;  
 And peals of thunder shook the firmament.  
 Henceforth a series of new time began,  
 The mighty years in long procession ran:  
 Once more the godlike David was restored,  
 1030 And willing nations knew their lawful lord.



- Note 1: "Religious frauds; management of wicked priests to gain power" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: David ("a man after [God's] own heart," according to 1 Samuel 13:14) represents Charles II.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: One of David's wives, who represents the childless queen, Catherine of Braganza.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: James Scott, Duke of Monmouth (1649–1685).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Monmouth had won repute as a soldier fighting for France against Holland and for Holland against France.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Anne Scott, Duchess of Buccleuch (pronounced *Bue-cloo*), a beauty and a great heiress.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Absalom killed his half-brother Amnon, who had raped Absalom's sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13:28–29). The parallel with Monmouth is vague. He is known to have committed acts of violence in his youth, but certainly not fratricide.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dryden recalls the political and religious controversies that, since the Reformation, had divided England and finally caused civil wars.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Adam rebelled because he felt he lacked ("wanted") liberty because he was forbidden to eat the fruit of one tree.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Oliver Cromwell.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Saul's son. He stands for Richard Cromwell, who succeeded his father as lord protector.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Where David reigned over Judah after the death of Saul and before he became king of Israel (2 Samuel 1–5). Charles had been crowned in Scotland in 1651.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The image worshiped by the children of Israel during the period that Moses spent on Mount Sinai, receiving the law

from God.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Inclined (see “Mac Flecknoe,” line 189 and p. 63, n. 8).  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Commonwealth. Dryden stigmatizes the Whigs by associating them with subversion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Roman Catholics. The original name of Jerusalem (here, London) was Jebus.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Such oppressive laws against Roman Catholics date from the time of Elizabeth I.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: French, therefore Catholic.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Here Dryden sneers at the doctrine of transubstantiation. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dryden charges that the Anglican clergy (“Hebrew priests”) resented proselytizing by Catholics chiefly because they stood to lose their tithes (“fleece”).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Bodily fluid. Such fluids were thought to determine health and temperament.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury (1621–1683). He had served in the parliamentary army and been a member of Cromwell’s council of state. He later helped bring back Charles and, in 1670, was made a member of the notorious Cabal Ministry, which formed an alliance with Louis XIV in which England betrayed her ally, Holland, and joined France in war against that country. In 1672 he became lord chancellor, but with the dissolution of the cabal in 1673, he was removed from office. Lines 146–49 apply perfectly to him.  
[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The soul is thought of as the animating principle, the force that puts the body in motion. Shaftesbury’s body seemed too small to house his fiery, energetic soul.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That genius and madness are akin is a very old idea.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See Plato’s definition of a human: “a featherless biped.”[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The triple alliance of England, Sweden, and Holland against France, 1668. Shaftesbury helped bring about the war against Holland in 1672.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The chief of the seventy elders who composed the Jewish supreme court. The allusion is to Shaftesbury's serving as lord chancellor from 1672 to 1673.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, David would have had occasion to write one fewer song of praise to heaven. The reference may be to 2 Samuel 22 or to Psalms 4.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
The moon "renews her prime" when its several phases recur on the same day of the solar calendar (complete a cycle) as happens approximately every twenty years. The crisis between Charles I and Parliament began to grow acute about 1640; Charles II returned in 1660; it is now 1680 and a full cycle has been completed.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, mob rule. To Dryden, *democracy* meant "popular government."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A planet whose influence destines him to kingship.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
After their exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, whose "extended wand" separated the waters of the Red Sea so that they crossed over on dry land, the Israelites were led in their forty-year wandering in the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13–14).  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Compare with Joel 2:28.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Solemn promises of fidelity.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Achitophel gives to Fortune the traditional attributes of the allegorical personification of Opportunity: bald except for a forelock, she can be seized only as she approaches.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Brussels, where Charles spent his last years in exile. David took refuge from Saul in Gath (1 Samuel 27:4).[Return to](#)

[reference 9](#)

- Note 1: After God rejected Saul, he sent Samuel to anoint the boy David, as a token that he should finally come to the throne (1 Samuel 16:1–13).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The seashore at Dover, where Charles landed (May 25, 1660).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Compare with the fall of Satan in *Paradise Lost* 1.50–124, which dims the brightness of the archangel. The choice of the undignified word *tumbling* is deliberate.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pharaoh is Louis XIV of France.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Compare with line 82 and p. 37, n. 6.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A title to the crown based on succession.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An alternative spelling of *mettle* (spirit). But a pun on *metal* is intended, as is obvious from the pun *angel* (a purely intellectual being and a coin). Ambition caused the revolt of the angels in heaven.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sirius, which in midsummer rises and sets with the sun and is thus associated with the maddening heat of the “dog days.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In the event of Charles’s dying without legitimate issue, the throne would constitutionally pass to his brother, James, or his descendants, the “collateral line.”[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Anger of the common people.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Race, in the sense of family.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Why does my mean birth impose such limits on me?[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The highest judicial counsel of the Jews, here, Parliament.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Whigs hoped to limit the special privileges of the Crown (the royal “prerogative”) by refusing to vote money to Charles. He circumvented them by living on French subsidies and refusing to summon Parliament.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: The chief magistrates and rulers of the Jews. Shaftesbury had won over ("gained") country gentlemen and nobles to his hostile view of James.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Before Saul, the first king of Israel, came to the throne, the Jews were governed by judges. Similarly Oliver Cromwell as lord protector took over the reins of government, after he had dissolved the Rump Parliament in 1653.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dutifulness to a parent.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In law, to convey the title to property to another person.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An irony (see line 7 and n. 2).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: James was given the title of generalissimo in 1678. In 1679 Monmouth was banished and withdrew to Holland.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: London rabble. Solyma was a name for Jerusalem.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Gentile; here, Roman Catholic.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
That is, Presbyterian clergymen. The tribe of Levi, assigned to duties in the tabernacle, carried the Ark of the Covenant during the forty-year sojourn in the wilderness (Numbers 4). Under the Commonwealth ("in the Judges' days") Presbyterianism became the state religion, and its clergy, therefore, "bore the ark." The Act of Uniformity (1662) forced the Presbyterian clergy out of their livings: in short, before the Popish Plot, they had been "pulled from the ark." They are represented here as joining the Whigs in the hope of restoring the Commonwealth, "their old beloved theocracy."  
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Priests had to be descendants of Aaron (Exodus 28:1, Numbers 18:7).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Loudest. The phrase is applied to hunting dogs. "Pack" and "scent" sustain the image.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Term used by certain Dissenters for those elected to salvation. The extreme fanaticism of the "saints" and their

claims to inspiration are characterized as a form of religious madness ("enthusiastic," line 530).[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9:

George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham (1628–1687), wealthy, brilliant, dissolute, and unstable. He had been an influential member of the cabal, but after 1673 had joined Shaftesbury in opposition to the court party. This is the least political of the satirical portraits in the poem. Buckingham had been the chief author of *The Rehearsal* (1671), the play that satirized heroic tragedy and ridiculed Dryden in the character of Mr. Bayes. Politics gave Dryden an opportunity to retaliate. He comments on this portrait in his "A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire." Dryden had two biblical Zimris in mind: the Zimri destroyed for his lustfulness and blasphemy (Numbers 25) and the conspirator and regicide of 1 Kings 16:8–20 and 2 Kings 9:31.

[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: See Numbers 13–14. "Well-hung": fluent of speech or sexually potent or both. For Balaam, see Numbers 22–24. "Cold": contrasts with the second meaning of *well-hung*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See Leviticus 10:1–2. "Canting": points to a Nonconformist, as does "new porridge," for Dissenters referred to the Book of Common Prayer contemptuously as "porridge," a hodgepodge, unsubstantial stuff.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The lamb slain during Passover; here, Christ. The identities of Balaam, Caleb, and Nadab have not been certainly established, although various Whig nobles have been suggested.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sir William Jones, attorney general, had been largely responsible for the passage of the first Exclusion Bill by the House of Commons. He prosecuted the accused in the Popish Plot.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:  
He cursed and stoned David when he fled into the wilderness during Absalom's revolt (2 Samuel 16:5–14). His name is used

here for one of the two sheriffs of London: Slingsby Bethel, a Whig, former republican, and virulent enemy of Charles. He packed juries with Whigs and so secured the acquittal of enemies of the court, among them Shaftesbury himself.

[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Sons of wickedness (see Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.490–505). Dryden probably intended a pun on Balliol, the Oxford college in which leading Whigs stayed during the brief and fateful meeting of Parliament at Oxford in 1681.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An austere Jewish sect that drank no wine (Jeremiah 35:2–19).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sheriff's dinner table.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: London burned in 1666.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Mount Sinai, where, during a fast of forty days, Moses received the law (Exodus 34:28).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
Or Korah, a rebellious Levite, swallowed up by the earth because of his crimes (Numbers 16). Corah is Titus Oates, the self-appointed, perjured, and "well-breathed" (long-winded) witness of the plot.  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Moses erected a brazen serpent to heal the Jews bitten by fiery serpents (Numbers 21:4–9). *Brass* also means impudence or shamelessness.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Oates's father, a clergyman, belonged to an obscure family of ribbon weavers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The first Christian martyr, accused by false witnesses (Acts 6–7).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Moses's face shone when he came down from Mount Sinai with the tables of the law (Exodus 34:29–30). Oates's face suggests high living, not spiritual illumination.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Oates falsely claimed to be a doctor of divinity in the University of Salamanca.[Return to reference 7](#)



- Note 8: Not inspired and hence excluded from Holy Writ.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:  
Agag is probably one of the five Catholic peers executed for the Popish Plot in 1680, most likely Lord Stafford, against whom Oates fabricated testimony. He is almost certainly not, as is usually suggested, Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey (see headnote, [p. 34](#)).  
[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See 1 Samuel 15, where “Agag’s murder” also occurs.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “So as to please the crowd” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The famous honey of Hybla in Sicily.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The woman with whom David committed adultery (2 Samuel 11). Here, Charles II’s French mistress, Louise de Keroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In 1680 Monmouth made a progress through the west of England, seeking popular support for his cause.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Thomas Thynne of Longleat. He entertained Monmouth on his journey in the west. *Wise* is, of course, ironic.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Titus Oates had sworn that both James, Duke of York, and the queen were involved in a similar plot to poison Charles II.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The fickle crowd flows and ebbs like the tide, which is pulled back and forth by the moon (hence “lunacy,” after the Latin *luna*, or “moon”).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: An allusion to the execution of Charles I.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Uzzah was struck dead because he sacrilegiously touched the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:6–7).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:



James Butler, Duke of Ormond (1610–1688), who was famous for his loyalty to the Stuart cause. He fought for Charles I in Ireland, and when that cause was hopeless, he joined Charles II in his exile abroad. He spent a large fortune on behalf of the king and continued to serve him loyally after the Restoration. Six of his ten children were dead (see line 830). See 2 Samuel 19:31–39.

[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Ormond's son Thomas, Earl of Ossory (1634–1680), a famous soldier and, like his father, devoted to Charles II. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: William Sancroft, archbishop of Canterbury. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Henry Compton, bishop of London. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: John Dolben, dean of Westminster. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The boys of Westminster School, which Dryden had attended. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: George Savile, Marquis of Halifax. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Edward Seymour, speaker of the House of Commons. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Duke of York had been banished from England. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Judges 16. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Earl of Shaftesbury. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Genesis 27:22. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Moses was not allowed to see the countenance of Jehovah (Exodus 33:20–23). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A god of the Philistines. "Belial": the incarnation of all evil. [Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *relish, pleasure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *London*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wholly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tests*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *English*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *caprice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *republic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shots*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disgraceful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *assuaged*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Protestants*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Roman Catholic clergy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Anglican clergy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *adulterated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brothels*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the king*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unruly intellect*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *men of genius*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *confused, hurried*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judge's robe*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *weeds*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *detected in*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suspicious*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *so that*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spontaneous*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *claim*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intelligence*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *taken back*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *common people*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pretext*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *forced*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *economy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *count*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *chemist*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reviling, abusing*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *constantly* [Return to reference](#) °

- °: *found out*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *staff*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *free with money*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prone to anger*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *France* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Holland*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *high water mark*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Dutch*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *set off to advantage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pluck, plunder*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pain relievers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceived*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bully*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what's theirs to give*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *judge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thwart*[Return to reference](#) °

**Mac Flecknoe** The target of this superb satire, which is cast in the form of a mock-heroic episode, is Thomas Shadwell (1640–1692), the playwright, with whom Dryden had been on good terms for a number of years, certainly as late as March 1678. Shadwell considered himself the successor of Ben Jonson and the champion of the type of comedy that Jonson had written, the “comedy of humors,” in which each character is presented under the domination of a single psychological trait or eccentricity, his humor. His plays are not without merit, but they are often clumsy and prolix and certainly much inferior to Jonson’s. For many years he had conducted a public argument with Dryden on the merits of Jonson’s comedies, which he thought Dryden undervalued. Exactly what moved Dryden to attack him is a matter of conjecture: he may simply have grown progressively bored and irritated by Shadwell and his tedious argument. The poem seems to have been written in late 1678 or 1679 and to have circulated only in manuscript until it was printed in 1682 in a pirated edition by an obscure publisher. By that time, the two playwrights were alienated by politics as well as by literary quarrels. Shadwell was a violent Whig and the reputed author of a sharp attack on Dryden as the Tory author of *Absalom and Achitophel* and “The Medal.” It was probably for this reason that the printer added the subtitle referring to Shadwell’s Whiggism in the phrase “true-blue-Protestant poet.” Political passions were running high, and sales would be helped if the poem seemed to refer to the events of the day.

Dryden exposes Shadwell to ridicule by using the devices of mock epic, which treats the low, mean, or absurd in the grand language, lofty style, and solemn tone of epic poetry. The obvious disparity between subject and style makes the satiric point. In 1678, a prolific, untalented writer, Richard Flecknoe, died. Dryden conceived the idea of presenting Shadwell (the self-proclaimed heir of Ben Jonson, the laureate) as the son and successor of Flecknoe (an irony also because Flecknoe was a Catholic priest)—hence *Mac* (son of) *Flecknoe*—from whom he inherits the throne of dullness. Flecknoe in the triple role of king, priest, and poet hails his successor,

pronounces a panegyric on his perfect fitness for the throne, anoints and crowns him, foretells his glorious reign, and as he sinks (leaden dullness cannot soar), leaves his mantle to fall symbolically on Shadwell's shoulders. The poem abounds in literary allusions—to Roman legend and history and to the *Aeneid*, to Abraham Cowley's fragmentary epic *The Davideis* (1656), to *Paradise Lost*, and to Shadwell's own plays. Biblical allusions add an unexpected dimension of incongruous dignity to the low scene. The coronation takes place in the City, to the plaudits of the citizens, who are fit to admire only what is dull.

# Mac Flecknoe

## *Or a Satire upon the True-Blue-Protestant Poet, T. S.*

All human things are subject to decay,  
And when fate summons, monarchs must obey.  
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus,<sup>1</sup> young  
Was called to empire, and had governed long;  
In prose and verse, was owned, without dispute,  
5 Through all the realms of Nonsense, absolute.  
This aged prince, now flourishing in peace,  
And blest with issue of a large increase,  
Worn out with business, did at length debate  
To settle the succession of the state;  
10 And, pondering which of all his sons was fit  
To reign, and wage immortal war with wit,  
Cried: "'Tis resolved; for nature pleads that he  
Should only rule, who most resembles me.  
Sh—<sup>2</sup> alone my perfect image bears,  
15 Mature in dullness from his tender years:  
Sh— alone, of all my sons, is he  
Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.  
The rest to some faint meaning make pretense,  
But Sh— never deviates into sense.  
20 Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,  
Strike through, and make a lucid interval;  
But Sh—'s genuine night admits no ray,  
His rising fogs prevail upon the day.  
Besides, his goodly fabric<sup>3</sup> fills the eye,  
25 And seems designed for thoughtless majesty:  
Thoughtless as monarch oaks that shade the plain,  
And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign.

Heywood and Shirley were but types of thee,<sup>4</sup>  
 Thou last great prophet of tautology.<sup>5</sup>  
 30 Even I, a dunce of more renown than they,  
 Was sent before but to prepare thy way;  
 And, coarsely clad in Norwich drugget,<sup>o</sup> came  
 To teach the nations in thy greater name.<sup>6</sup>  
 My warbling lute, the lute I whilom<sup>o</sup> strung,  
 35 When to King John of Portugal<sup>7</sup> I sung,  
 Was but the prelude to that glorious day,  
 When thou on silver Thames didst cut thy way,  
 With well-timed oars before the royal barge,  
 Swelled with the pride of thy celestial charge;  
 40 And big with hymn, commander of a host,  
 The like was ne'er in Epsom blankets tossed.<sup>8</sup>  
 Methinks I see the new Arion<sup>9</sup> sail,  
 The lute still trembling underneath thy nail.  
 At thy well-sharpened thumb from shore to shore  
 45 The treble squeaks for fear, the basses roar;  
 Echoes from Pissing Alley<sup>1</sup> Sh—— call,  
 And Sh—— they resound from Aston Hall.  
 About thy boat the little fishes throng,  
 As at the morning toast<sup>o</sup> that floats along.  
 50 Sometimes, as prince of thy harmonious band,  
 Thou wield'st thy papers in thy threshing hand,  
 St. André's<sup>2</sup> feet ne'er kept more equal time,  
 Not ev'n the feet of thy own *Psyche's* rhyme;  
 Though they in number as in sense excel:  
 55 So just, so like tautology, they fell,  
 That, pale with envy, Singleton<sup>3</sup> forswore  
 The lute and sword, which he in triumph  
 bore, }  
 And vowed he ne'er would act Villerius<sup>4</sup>  
 more."  
 60 Here stopped the good old sire, and wept for joy

In silent raptures of the hopeful boy.  
All arguments, but most his plays, persuade,  
That for anointed dullness<sup>5</sup> he was made.

65       Close to the walls which fair Augusta<sup>o</sup> bind  
(The fair Augusta much to fears inclined),<sup>6</sup>  
An ancient fabric,<sup>o</sup> raised to inform the sight,  
There stood of yore, and Barbican it high:<sup>o</sup>  
A watchtower once; but now, so fate ordains,  
Of all the pile an empty name remains.  
70       From its old ruins brothel houses rise,  
Scenes of lewd loves, and of polluted joys,  
Where their vast courts the mother-strumpets keep,  
And, undisturbed by watch, in silence sleep.  
Near these a Nursery<sup>7</sup> erects its head,  
Where queens are formed, and future heroes bred;  
75       Where unfledged actors learn to laugh and cry,  
Where infant punks<sup>o</sup> their tender voices try,  
And little Maximins<sup>8</sup> the gods defy.       }  
Great Fletcher<sup>9</sup> never treads in buskins here,       }  
80       Nor greater Jonson dares in socks<sup>1</sup> appear;  
But gentle Simkin<sup>2</sup> just reception finds  
Amidst this monument of vanished minds:  
Pure clinches<sup>o</sup> the suburban Muse affords,  
And Panton<sup>3</sup> waging harmless war with words.  
Here Flecknoe, as a place to fame well known,  
85       Ambitiously design'd his Sh——'s throne;  
For ancient Dekker<sup>4</sup> prophesied long since,       }  
That in this pile would reign a mighty prince,  
Born for a scourge of wit, and flail of sense;       }  
90       To whom true dullness should some *Psyches*  
owe,  
But worlds of *Misers* from his pen should flow;  
*Humorists* and *Hypocrites*<sup>5</sup> it should produce,  
Whole Raymond families, and tribes of Bruce.<sup>6</sup>



Now Empress Fame had published the renown  
Of Sh——'s coronation through the town.  
95 Roused by report of Fame, the nations meet,  
From near Bunhill, and distant Watling Street.<sup>7</sup>  
No Persian carpets spread the imperial way,  
But scattered limbs of mangled poets lay;  
From dusty shops neglected authors come,  
100 Martyrs of pies, and relics of the bum.<sup>8</sup>  
Much Heywood, Shirley, Ogilby<sup>9</sup> there lay,  
But loads of Sh—— almost choked the way.  
Bilked stationers for yeomen stood prepared,  
And Herringman was captain of the guard.<sup>1</sup>  
105 The hoary prince in majesty appeared,  
High on a throne of his own labors reared.  
At his right hand our young Ascanius sate,  
Rome's other hope, and pillar of the state.  
His brows thick fogs, instead of glories, grace,  
110 And lambent dullness played around his face.<sup>2</sup>  
As Hannibal did to the altars come,  
Sworn by his sire a mortal foe to Rome,<sup>3</sup>  
So Sh—— swore, nor should his vow be vain,  
That he till death true dullness would maintain;  
115 And, in his father's right, and realm's defense,  
Ne'er to have peace with wit, nor truce with sense.  
The king himself the sacred unction<sup>4</sup> made,  
As king by office, and as priest by trade.  
In his sinister<sup>o</sup> hand, instead of ball,  
120 He placed a mighty mug of potent ale;  
*Love's Kingdom* to his right he did convey,  
At once his scepter, and his rule of sway;  
Whose righteous lore the prince had practiced  
young,  
And from whose loins recorded *Psyche* sprung.  
125 His temples, last, with poppies were o'erspread,  
That nodding seemed to consecrate his head.<sup>5</sup>

Just at that point of time, if fame not lie,  
 On his left hand twelve reverend owls did fly.<sup>6</sup>  
 So Romulus, 'tis sung, by Tiber's brook,  
 130 Presage of sway from twice six vultures took.  
 The admiring throng loud acclamations make,  
 And omens of his future empire take.  
 The sire then shook the honors<sup>7</sup> of his head,  
 And from his brows damps of oblivion shed  
 135 Full on the filial dullness: long he stood,  
 Repelling from his breast the raging god;  
 At length burst out in this prophetic mood: }  
     "Heavens bless my son, from Ireland let  
         him reign  
 To far Barbadoes on the western main;<sup>8</sup>  
 140 Of his dominion may no end be known,  
 And greater than his father's be his throne;  
 Beyond *Love's Kingdom* let him stretch his pen!"  
 He paused, and all the people cried, "Amen."  
 Then thus continued he: "My son, advance  
 145 Still in new impudence, new ignorance.  
 Success let others teach, learn thou from me  
 Pangs without birth, and fruitless industry.  
 Let *Virtuosos* in five years be writ;  
 Yet not one thought accuse thy toil of wit.  
 150 Let gentle George<sup>9</sup> in triumph tread the stage,  
 Make Dorimant betray, and Loveit rage;  
 Let Cully, Cockwood, Fopling, charm the pit,  
 And in their folly show the writer's wit.  
 Yet still thy fools shall stand in thy defense,  
 155 And justify their author's want of sense.  
 Let 'em be all by thy own model made  
 Of dullness, and desire no foreign aid;  
 That they to future ages may be known,  
 Not copies drawn, but issue of thy own.  
 160 Nay, let thy men of wit too be the same,

All full of thee, and differing but in name.  
But let no alien S—dl—y<sup>1</sup> interpose,  
To lard with wit<sup>2</sup> thy hungry *Epsom* prose.  
And when false flowers of rhetoric thou wouldst cull,  
165 Trust nature, do not labor to be dull;  
But write thy best, and top; and, in each line,  
Sir Formal's<sup>3</sup> oratory will be thine:  
Sir Formal, though unsought, attends thy quill,  
And does thy northern dedications<sup>4</sup> fill.  
170 Nor let false friends seduce thy mind to fame,  
By arrogating Jonson's hostile name.  
Let father Flecknoe fire thy mind with praise,  
And uncle Ogilby thy envy raise.  
Thou art my blood, where Jonson has no part:  
175 What share have we in nature, or in art?  
Where did his wit on learning fix a brand,  
And rail at arts he did not understand?  
Where made he love in Prince Nicander's vein,<sup>5</sup>  
Or swept the dust in *Psyche's* humble strain?  
180 Where sold he bargains, 'whip-stitch,<sup>6</sup> kiss my arse,'  
Promised a play and dwindled to a farce?<sup>7</sup>  
When did his Muse from Fletcher scenes purloin,  
As thou whole Eth'rege dost transfuse to thine?  
But so transfused, as oil on water's flow,  
185 His always floats above, thine sinks below.  
This is thy province, this thy wondrous way,  
New humors to invent for each new play:  
This is that boasted bias<sup>8</sup> of thy mind,  
By which one way, to dullness, 'tis inclined;  
190 Which makes thy writings lean on one side still,  
And, in all changes, that way bends thy will.  
Nor let thy mountain-belly make pretense  
Of likeness; thine's a tympany<sup>9</sup> of sense.  
A tun<sup>o</sup> of man in thy large bulk is writ,  
195 But sure thou'rt but a kilderkin<sup>o</sup> of wit.

Like mine, thy gentle numbers feebly creep;  
 Thy tragic Muse gives smiles, thy comic sleep.  
 With whate'er gall thou sett'st thyself to write,  
 Thy inoffensive satires never bite.  
 200 In thy felonious heart though venom lies,  
 It does but touch thy Irish pen,<sup>1</sup> and dies.  
 Thy genius calls thee not to purchase fame  
 In keen iambics,<sup>2</sup> but mild anagram.  
 205 Leave writing plays, and choose for thy command  
 Some peaceful province in acrostic<sup>2</sup> land.  
 There thou may'st wings display and altars raise,<sup>3</sup>  
 And torture one poor word ten thousand ways.  
 Or, if thou wouldst thy different talent suit,  
 Set thy own songs, and sing them to thy lute."  
 210 He said: but his last words were scarcely heard  
 For Bruce and Longville had a trap prepared,  
 And down they sent the yet declaiming  
     bard.<sup>4</sup> }  
 Sinking he left his drugget robe behind,  
 Borne upwards by a subterranean wind.  
 215 The mantle fell to the young prophet's part,<sup>5</sup>  
 With double portion of his father's art.

ca. 1679

## Endnotes

1682

- Note 1: In 31 B.C.E. Octavian became the first Roman emperor, at the age of thirty-two. He assumed the title Augustus in 27 B.C.E. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Thomas Shadwell. The initial and second letter of the name followed by a dash give the appearance, but only the appearance, of protecting Dryden's victim by concealing his name. A common device in the satire of the period. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: His body. Shadwell was a corpulent man. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Thomas Heywood (ca. 1570–1641) and James Shirley (1596–1666), playwrights popular before the closing of the theaters in 1642 but now out of fashion. They are introduced here as “types” (prefigurings) of Shadwell, in the sense that Solomon was regarded as an Old Testament prefiguring of Christ, the “last [final] great prophet.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Unnecessary repetition of meaning in different words.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The parallel between Flecknoe, as forerunner of Shadwell, and John the Baptist, as forerunner of Jesus, is made plain in lines 32–34 by the use of details and even words taken from Matthew 3:3–4 and John 1:23.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Flecknoe boasted of the patronage of the Portuguese king.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A reference to Shadwell’s comedy *Epsom Wells* and to the farcical scene in his *Virtuoso*, in which Sir Samuel Hearty is tossed in a blanket.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A legendary Greek poet. Returning home by sea, he was robbed and thrown overboard by the sailors, but was saved by a dolphin that had been charmed by his music.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Actual London street name, changed to Little Friday Street in 1848.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A French dancer who designed the choreography of Shadwell’s opera *Psyche* (1675). Dryden’s sneer at the mechanical metrics of the songs in *Psyche* is justified.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: John Singleton (d. 1686), a musician at the Theatre Royal.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A character in Sir William Davenant’s *Siege of Rhodes* (1656), the first English opera.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The anticipated phrase is “anointed *majesty*.” English kings are anointed with oil at their coronations.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: This line alludes to the fears excited by the Popish Plot (see *Absalom and Achitophel*, p. 35).[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: The name of a training school for young actors.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Maximin is the cruel emperor, in Dryden's *Tyrannic Love* (1669), notorious for his bombast.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: John Fletcher (1579–1625), the playwright and collaborator with Francis Beaumont (ca. 1584–1616).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "Buskins" and "socks" were the symbols of tragedy and comedy, respectively. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A popular character in low farces.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Said to have been a celebrated punster.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Thomas Dekker (ca. 1572–1632), the playwright, whom Jonson had satirized in *The Poetaster*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Three of Shadwell's plays; *The Hypocrite*, a failure, was not published.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Raymond and Bruce are characters in *The Humorists* and *The Virtuoso*, respectively.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Because Bunhill is about a quarter mile and Watling Street little more than a half mile from the site of the Nursery, where the coronation is held, Shadwell's fame is narrowly circumscribed. Moreover, his subjects live in the heart of the City, regarded by men of wit and fashion as the abode of bad taste and middle-class vulgarity.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Unsold books were used to line pie plates and as toilet paper.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: John Ogilby, a translator of Homer and Virgil, ridiculed by both Dryden and Pope as a bad poet.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "Bilked stationers": cheated publishers, acting as "yeomen" of the guard, led by Henry Herringman, who until 1679 was the publisher of both Shadwell and Dryden.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ascanius, or Iulus, was the son of Aeneas. Virgil referred to him as "*spes altera Romae*" ("Rome's other hope," *Aeneid* 12.168). As Troy fell, he was marked as favored by the

gods when a flickering (“lambent”) flame played round his head (*Aeneid* 2.680–84).[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Hannibal, who almost conquered Rome in 216 B.C.E., during the Second Punic War, took this oath at the age of nine (Livy 21.1).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The sacramental oil, used in the coronation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: During the coronation a British monarch holds two symbols of the throne: a globe (“ball”) representing the world in the left hand and a scepter in the right. Shadwell’s symbols of monarchy are a mug of ale, Flecknoe’s dreary play *Love’s Kingdom*, and a crown of poppies, which suggest heaviness, dullness, and drowsiness. The poppies also refer obliquely to Shadwell’s addiction to opium.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Birds of night. Appropriate substitutes for the twelve vultures whose flight confirmed to Romulus the destined site of Rome, of which he was founder and king.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Ornaments, hence locks.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Shadwell’s empire is vast but empty.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Sir George Etherege (ca. 1635–1691), a writer of brilliant comedies. In the next couplet Dryden names characters from his plays.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sir Charles Sedley (1638–1701), wit, rake, poet, and playwright. Dryden hints that he contributed more than the prologue to Shadwell’s *Epsom Wells*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This phrase recalls a sentence in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*: “They lard their lean books with the fat of others’ works.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sir Formal Trifle, the ridiculous and vapid orator in *The Virtuoso*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Shadwell frequently dedicated his works to the Duke of Newcastle and members of his family.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In *Psyche*.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A nonsense word frequently used by Sir Samuel Hearty in *The Virtuoso*. “Sold . . . bargains”: answered an innocent



question with a coarse or indecent phrase, as in this line.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Low comedy that depends largely on situation rather than wit, consistently condemned by Dryden and other serious playwrights.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In bowling, the spin given to the ball that causes it to swerve. Dryden closely parodies a passage in Shadwell's epilogue to *The Humorists*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A swelling in some part of the body caused by flatulence.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Dryden accuses Flecknoe and his "son" of being Irish. Ireland suggested only poverty, superstition, and barbarity to 17th-century Londoners.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A poem in which the first letter of each line, read downward, makes up the name of the person or thing that is the subject of the poem. "Anagram": the transposition of letters in a word so as to make a new one.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Wings" and "altars" refer to poems in the shape of these objects, as in George Herbert's "Easter Wings" and "The Altar." Dryden is citing instances of triviality and overingenuity in literature.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In *The Virtuoso*, Bruce and Longville play this trick on Sir Formal Trifle while he makes a speech.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: When the prophet Elijah was carried to heaven in a chariot of fire borne on a whirlwind, his mantle fell on his successor, the younger prophet Elisha (2 Kings 2:8–14). Flecknoe, prophet of dullness, naturally cannot ascend, but must sink.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *coarse woolen cloth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *formerly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sewage*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *London*[Return to reference °](#)



- °: *building*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *was called*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sex workers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *puns*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *left*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *large cask*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *small cask*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sharp satire*[Return to reference](#) °

# A Song for St. Cecilia's Day<sup>1</sup>

## 1

From harmony, from heavenly harmony  
This universal frame began:  
When Nature underneath a heap  
Of jarring atoms lay,  
And could not heave her head,  
5 The tuneful voice was heard from high:  
"Arise, ye more than dead."  
Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,<sup>2</sup>  
In order to their stations leap,  
And Music's power obey.  
10 From harmony, from heavenly harmony  
This universal frame began:  
From harmony to harmony  
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,  
The diapason<sup>3</sup> closing full in man.  
15

## 2

What passion cannot Music raise and quell!<sup>4</sup>  
When Jubal struck the corded shell,<sup>5</sup>  
His listening brethren stood around,  
And, wondering, on their faces fell  
To worship that celestial sound.  
20 Less than a god they thought there could not dwell  
Within the hollow of that shell  
That spoke so sweetly and so well.  
What passion cannot Music raise and quell!

## 3

25       The trumpet's loud clangor  
          Excites us to arms,  
          With shrill notes of anger,  
          And mortal alarms.  
          The double double double beat  
          Of the thundering drum  
30       Cries: "Hark! the foes come;  
          Charge, charge, 'tis too late to retreat."

#### 4

          The soft complaining flute  
          In dying notes discovers  
          The woes of hopeless lovers,  
35       Whose dirge is whispered by the warbling lute.

#### 5

          Sharp violins<sup>6</sup> proclaim  
          Their jealous pangs, and desperation,  
          Fury, frantic indignation,  
40       Depth of pains, and height of passion,  
          For the fair, disdainful dame.

#### 6

          But O! what art can teach,  
          What human voice can reach,  
          The sacred organ's praise?  
          Notes inspiring holy love,  
45       Notes that wing their heavenly ways  
          To mend the choirs above.

#### 7

          Orpheus<sup>7</sup> could lead the savage race;  
          And trees unrooted left their place,

50 Sequacious of<sup>o</sup> the lyre;  
But bright Cecilia raised the wonder higher:  
When to her organ vocal breath was given,  
An angel heard, and straight appeared,<sup>8</sup>  
Mistaking earth for heaven.

#### GRAND CHORUS

55 *As from the power of sacred lays*  
*The spheres began to move,*  
*And sung the great Creator's praise<sup>9</sup>*  
*To all the blest above;*  
*So, when the last and dreadful hour*  
60 *This crumbling pageant<sup>1</sup> shall devour,*  
*The trumpet shall be heard on high,*  
*The dead shall live, the living die,*  
*And Music shall untune the sky.<sup>2</sup>*

}

## Endnotes

1687

- Note 1:  
St. Cecilia, a Roman lady, was an early Christian martyr. She has long been regarded as the patroness of music and the supposed inventor of the organ. Celebrations of her festival day (November 22) in England were usually devoted to music and the praise of music, and from about 1683 to 1703 the Musical Society in London annually commemorated it with a religious service and a public concert. This concert always included an ode written and set to music for the occasion, of which the two by Dryden ("A Song for St. Cecilia's Day," 1687, and "Alexander's Feast," 1697) are the most distinguished. G. B. Draghi, an Italian brought to England by Charles II, set this ode to music; but Handel's fine score, composed in 1739, has completely obscured the original setting. This is an irregular ode in the manner of Cowley. In stanzas 3–6, Dryden boldly attempted to

suggest in the sounds of his words the characteristic tones of the instruments mentioned.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: "Nature": created nature, ordered by the Divine Wisdom out of chaos, which Dryden, adopting the physics of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, describes as composed of the warring and discordant ("jarring") atoms of the four elements: earth, fire, water, and air ("cold," "hot," "moist," and "dry").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The entire compass of tones in the scale. Dryden is thinking of the Chain of Being, the ordered creation from inanimate nature up to humans, God's latest and final work. The just gradations of notes in a scale are analogous to the equally just gradations in the ascending scale of created beings. Both are the result of harmony.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The power of music to describe, evoke, or subdue emotion ("passion") is a frequent theme in 17th-century literature. In stanzas 2–6, the poet considers music as awakening religious awe, warlike courage, sorrow for unrequited love, jealousy and fury, and the impulse to worship God.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: According to Genesis 4:21, Jubal was the inventor of the lyre and the pipe. Dryden imagines Jubal's lyre to have been made of a tortoise-shell ("corded shell").[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A reference to the bright tone of the modern violin, introduced into England at the Restoration. The tone of the old-fashioned viol is much duller.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Legendary poet, son of one of the Muses, who played so wonderfully on the lyre that wild beasts ("the savage race") grew tame and followed him, as did even rocks and trees.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: According to the legend, it was Cecilia's piety, not her music, that brought an angel to visit her.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: As it was harmony that ordered the universe, so it was angelic song ("sacred lays") that put the celestial bodies ("spheres") in motion. The harmonious chord that results from

the traditional “music of the spheres” is a hymn of “praise” sung by created nature to its “Creator.”[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: The universe, the stage on which the drama of human salvation has been acted out.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The “last trump” of 1 Corinthians 15:52, which will announce the Resurrection and the Last Judgment.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *following*[Return to reference °](#)

## Epigram on Milton<sup>1</sup>

Three poets,<sup>2</sup> in three distant ages born,  
Greece, Italy, and England did adorn.  
The first in loftiness of thought surpassed,  
The next in majesty, in both the last:  
The force of Nature could no farther go;  
To make a third, she joined the former two.

### Endnotes

1688

- Note 1: Engraved beneath the portrait of Milton in Jacob Tonson's edition of *Paradise Lost* (1688).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, Homer, Virgil, and Milton.[Return to reference 2](#)

# CRITICISM

Dryden's impulse to write criticism came from his practical urge to explain and justify his own writings; his attraction to clear, ordered theoretical principles; and his growing sense of himself as a leader of English literary taste and judgment. The Elizabethans, largely impelled by the example of Italian humanists, had produced an interesting but unsystematic body of critical writings. Dryden could look back to such pioneering works as George Puttenham's *Art of English Poesy* (1589), Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* (1595), Samuel Daniel's *Defense of Rhyme* (ca. 1603), and Ben Jonson's *Timber, or Discoveries* (1641). These and later writings Dryden knew, as he knew the ancients and the important contemporary French critics, notably Pierre Corneille, René Rapin, and Nicolas Boileau. Taken as a whole, his critical prefaces and dedications, which appeared between 1664 and 1700, are the work of a man of independent mind who has made his own synthesis of critical canons from wide reading, a great deal of thinking, and the constant practice of the art of writing. As a critic he is no one's disciple, and he has the saving grace of being always willing to change his mind.

All but a very few of Dryden's critical works (most notably *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*) grew out of the works to which they served as prefaces: comedies, heroic plays, tragedies, translations, and poems of various sorts. Each work posed problems that Dryden was eager to discuss with his readers, and the topics that he treated proved to be important in the development of the new literature of which he was the principal advocate. He dealt with the processes of



literary creation, the poet's relation to tradition, the forms of modern drama, the craft of poetry, and above all the genius of earlier poets: Shakespeare, Jonson, Chaucer, Juvenal, Horace, Homer, and Virgil. His critical perspective, both authoritative and open-minded, profoundly influenced critical practice for decades.

# ***From An Essay of Dramatic Poesy***<sup>1</sup>

## **[TWO SORTS OF BAD POETRY]**

\* \* \* "I have a mortal apprehension of two poets,<sup>2</sup> whom this victory, with the help of both her wings, will never be able to escape." "'Tis easy to guess whom you intend," said Lisideius; "and without naming them, I ask you if one of them does not perpetually pay us with clenches<sup>3</sup> upon words, and a certain clownish kind of raillery?<sup>4</sup> if now and then he does not offer at a catachresis or Clevelandism, wresting and torturing a word into another meaning: in fine, if he be not one of those whom the French would call *un mauvais buffon*,<sup>5</sup> one who is so much a well-willer to the satire, that he spares no man; and though he cannot strike a blow to hurt any, yet ought to be punished for the malice of the action, as our witches are justly hanged, because they think themselves so, and suffer deservedly for believing they did mischief, because they meant it." "You have described him," said Crites, "so exactly that I am afraid to come after you with my other extremity of poetry. He is one of those who, having had some advantage of education and converse, knows better than the other what a poet should be, but puts it into practice more unluckily than any man; his style and matter are everywhere alike: he is the most calm, peaceable writer you ever read: he never disquiets your passions with the least concernment, but still leaves you in as even a temper as he found you; he is a very Leveller<sup>6</sup> in poetry: he creeps along with ten little words in every line, and helps out his numbers with *for to*, and *unto*, and all the pretty expletives<sup>7</sup> he can find, till he drags them to the end of another line; while the sense is left tired halfway behind it: he doubly starves all his verses, first for want of thought, and then of expression; his poetry neither has wit in it, nor seems to have it; like him in Martial:

***Pauper videri Cinna vult, et est pauper.*<sup>8</sup>**

"He affects plainness, to cover his want of imagination: when he writes the serious way, the highest flight of his fancy is some miserable antithesis, or seeming contradiction; and in the comic he is still reaching at some thin conceit, the ghost of a jest, and that too flies before him, never to be caught; these swallows which we see before us on the Thames are the just resemblance of his wit: you may observe how near the water they stoop, how many proffers they make to dip, and yet how seldom they touch it; and when they do, it is but the surface: they skim over it but to catch a gnat, and then mount into the air and leave it."

**[THE WIT OF THE ANCIENTS: THE UNIVERSAL]<sup>9</sup>**

\* \* \* "A thing well said will be wit in all languages; and though it may lose something in the translation, yet to him who reads it in the original, 'tis still the same: he has an idea of its excellency, though it cannot pass from his mind into any other expression or words than those in which he finds it. When Phaedria, in the *Eunuch*,<sup>1</sup> had a command from his mistress to be absent two days, and, encouraging himself to go through with it, said, '*Tan-dem ego non ilia caream, si sit opus, vel totum triduum?*'<sup>2</sup>—Parmeno, to mock the softness of his master, lifting up his hands and eyes, cries out, as it were in admiration, '*Hui! universum triduum!*'<sup>3</sup> the elegance of which *universum*, though it cannot be rendered in our language, yet leaves an impression on our souls: but this happens seldom in him; in Plautus<sup>4</sup> oftener, who is infinitely too bold in his metaphors and coining words, out of which many times his wit is nothing; which questionless was one reason why Horace falls upon him so severely in those verses:

*Sed proavi nostri Plautinos et numeros et  
Laudavere sales, nimium patienter utrumque,  
Ne dicam stolide.*<sup>5</sup>

For Horace himself was cautious to obtrude a new word on his readers, and makes custom and common use the best measure of receiving it into our writings:

*Multa renascentur quae nunc cecidere, cadentque  
Quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus,  
Quem penes arbitrium est, et jus, et norma  
loquendi.*<sup>6</sup>

"The not observing this rule is that which the world has blamed in our satirist, Cleveland: to express a thing hard and unnaturally is his new way of elocution. 'Tis true no poet but may sometimes use a catachresis: Virgil does it—

*Mistaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho*<sup>7</sup>—

in his eclogue of Pollio; and in his seventh *Aeneid*:

*mirantur et undae,  
Miratur nemus insuetum fulgentia longe  
Scuta virum fluvio pictasque innare carinas.*<sup>8</sup>

And Ovid once so modestly that he asks leave to do it:

*quem, si verbo audacia detur,  
Haud metuam summi dixisse Palatia caeli.*<sup>9</sup>

calling the court of Jupiter by the name of Augustus his palace; though in another place he is more bold, where he says, '*et longas visent Capitolia pompas.*<sup>1</sup> But to do this always, and never be able to write a line without it, though it may be admired by some few pedants, will not pass upon those who know that wit is best conveyed to us in the most easy language; and is most to be admired when a great thought comes dressed in words so commonly

received that it is understood by the meanest apprehensions, as the best meat is the most easily digested: but we cannot read a verse of Cleveland's without making a face at it, as if every word were a pill to swallow: he gives us many times a hard nut to break our teeth, without a kernel for our pains. So that there is this difference betwixt his satires and Doctor Donne's; that the one gives us deep thoughts in common language, though rough cadence; the other gives us common thoughts in abstruse words: 'tis true in some places his wit is independent of his words, as in that of the *Rebel Scot*:

Had Cain been Scot, God would have changed his  
doom;  
Not forced him wander, but confined him home.<sup>2</sup>

"*Si sic omnia dixisset*!"<sup>3</sup> This is wit in all languages: it is like mercury, never to be lost or killed: and so that other—

For beauty, like white powder, makes no noise,  
And yet the silent hypocrite destroys.<sup>4</sup>

You see that the last line is highly metaphorical, but it is so soft and gentle that it does not shock us as we read it."

## Endnotes

1668

- Note 1:  
With the reopening of the theaters in 1660, older plays were revived, but despite their power and charm, they seemed old-fashioned. Although new playwrights, ambitious to create a modern English drama, soon appeared, they were uncertain of their direction. What, if anything, useful could they learn from the dramatic practice of the ancients? Should they ignore the English dramatists of the late 16th and early 17th centuries? Should they make their example the vigorous contemporary

drama of France? Dryden addresses himself to these and other problems in this essay, his first extended piece of criticism. Its purpose, he tells us, was "chiefly to vindicate the honor of our English writers from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them." Its method is skeptical: Dryden presents several points of view, but imposes none. The form is a dialogue among friends, like the *Tusculan Disputations* or the *Brutus* of Cicero. Crites praises the drama of the ancients; Eugenius protests against their authority and argues for the idea of progress in the arts; Lisideius urges the excellence of French plays; and Neander, speaking in the climactic position, defends the native tradition and the greatness of Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Jonson. The dialogue takes place on June 3, 1665, in a boat on the Thames. The four friends are rowed downstream to listen to the cannonading of the English and Dutch fleets, engaged in battle off the Suffolk coast. As the gunfire recedes they are assured of victory and order their boatman to return to London, and naturally enough they fall to discussing the number of bad poems that the victory will evoke.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Crites here is probably referring to Robert Wilde and possibly to Richard Flecknoe, whom Dryden later ridiculed in "Mac Flecknoe" (p. 59). Their actual identity is unimportant, for they merely represent two extremes in poetry, both deplorable: the fantastic and extravagant manner of decadent metaphysical wit and its opposite, the flat and the dull. The new poetry was to seek a mean between these extremes (see Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* 2.239–42 and 289–300, pp. 526–27). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Puns. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Boorish banter. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A malicious jester (French). "Catagresis": the use of a word in a sense remote from its normal meaning. A legitimate figure of speech used by all poets, it had been abused by John Cleveland (1613–1658), who was at first admired for his ingenuity, but whose reputation declined rapidly after the

Restoration. A Clevelandism: "The marigold, whose courtier's face / *Echoes* the sun."[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: The Levellers were radical egalitarians and republicans, a powerful political force in the Puritan army about 1648. They were suppressed by Cromwell. "Passions": emotions. "Still": always.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Words used merely to fill out a line of verse (see Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* 2.346–47, p. 528).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cinna wishes to seem poor, and he is poor (Latin; *Epigrams* 8.19).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Eugenius is in the midst of remarks about the limitations of the ancients.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A comedy by the Roman poet Terence (ca. 185–159 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Shall I not then do without her, if need be, for three whole days? (Latin).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The wit of Parmeno's exclamation, "Oh, three entire days," depends on *universum*, which suggests that a lover may regard three days as an eternity. "Admiration": wonder.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Titus Maccus Plautus (ca. 254–184 B.C.E.), Roman comic poet.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: But our ancestors too tolerantly (I do not say foolishly) praised both the verse and the wit of Plautus (Latin; *Art of Poetry*, lines 270–72). Dryden misquotes slightly.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Many words that have perished will be born again, and those shall perish that are now esteemed, if usage wills it, in whose power are the judgment, the law, and the pattern of speech (Latin; *Art of Poetry*, lines 70–72).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: [The earth] shall give forth the Egyptian bean, mingled with the smiling acanthus (Latin; *Eclogues* 4.20). "Smiling acanthus" is a catachresis.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Actually *Aeneid* 8.91–93. Dryden's paraphrase makes the point clearly: "The woods and waters wonder at the gleam / Of shields and painted ships that stem the stream" (Latin;

*Aeneid*. 8.125–26). “Wonder” is a catachresis.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: [This is the place] which, if boldness of expression be permitted, I shall not hesitate to call the Palace of high heaven (Latin; *Metamorphoses* 1.175–76).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: And the Capitol shall see the long processions (Latin; *Metamorphoses* 1.561).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lines 63–64.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Had he said everything thus! (Latin; Juvenal’s *Satires* 10.123–24).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From *Rupertismus*, lines 39–40. Mercury is said to be “killed” if its fluidity is destroyed.[Return to reference 4](#)



# ***From The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Heroic License***<sup>1</sup>

## **["BOLDNESS" OF FIGURES AND TROPES DEFENDED: THE APPEAL TO "NATURE"]**

\* \* \* They, who would combat general authority with particular opinion, must first establish themselves a reputation of understanding better than other men. Are all the flights of heroic poetry to be concluded bombast, unnatural, and mere madness, because they are not affected with their excellencies? It is just as reasonable as to conclude there is no day, because a blind man cannot distinguish of light and colors. Ought they not rather, in modesty, to doubt of their own judgments, when they think this or that expression in Homer, Virgil, Tasso, or Milton's *Paradise* to be too far strained, than positively to conclude that 'tis all fustian and mere nonsense? 'Tis true there are limits to be set betwixt the boldness and rashness of a poet; but he must understand those limits who pretends to judge as well as he who undertakes to write: and he who has no liking to the whole ought, in reason, to be excluded from censuring of the parts. He must be a lawyer before he mounts the tribunal; and the judicature of one court, too, does not qualify a man to preside in another. He may be an excellent pleader in the Chancery, who is not fit to rule the Common Pleas.<sup>2</sup> But I will presume for once to tell them that the boldest strokes of poetry, when they are managed artfully, are those which most delight the reader.

Virgil and Horace, the severest writers of the severest age, have made frequent use of the hardest metaphors and of the strongest hyperboles; and in this case the best authority is the best argument, for generally to have pleased, and through all ages, must bear the force of universal tradition. And if you would appeal from thence to right reason, you will gain no more by it in effect than, first, to set

up your reason against those authors, and, secondly, against all those who have admired them. You must prove why that ought not to have pleased which has pleased the most learned and the most judicious; and, to be thought knowing, you must first put the fool upon all mankind. If you can enter more deeply than they have done into the causes and resorts<sup>3</sup> of that which moves pleasure in a reader, the field is open, you may be heard: but those springs of human nature are not so easily discovered by every superficial judge: it requires philosophy, as well as poetry, to sound the depth of all the passions, what they are in themselves, and how they are to be provoked; and in this science the best poets have excelled. \* \*

\* From hence have sprung the tropes and figures,<sup>4</sup> for which they wanted a name who first practiced them and succeeded in them. Thus I grant you that the knowledge of Nature was the original rule, and that all poets ought to study her, as well as Aristotle and Horace, her interpreters.<sup>5</sup> But then this also undeniably follows, that those things which delight all ages must have been an imitation of Nature—which is all I contend. Therefore is rhetoric made an art; therefore the names of so many tropes and figures were invented, because it was observed they had such and such effect upon the audience. Therefore catachreses and hyperboles<sup>6</sup> have found their place amongst them; not that they were to be avoided, but to be used judiciously and placed in poetry as heightenings and shadows are in painting, to make the figure bolder, and cause it to stand off to sight. \* \* \*

#### [WIT AS "PROPRIETY"]

\* \* \* [Wit] is a propriety of thoughts and words; or, in other terms, thought and words elegantly adapted to the subject. If our critics will join issue on this definition, that we may *convenire in aliquo tertio*;<sup>7</sup> if they will take it as a granted principle, it will be easy to put an end to this dispute. No man will disagree from another's judgment concerning the dignity of style in heroic poetry; but all reasonable men will conclude it necessary that sublime subjects

ought to be adorned with the sublimest, and, consequently, often with the most figurative expressions. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

1677

- Note 1:  
This essay was prefixed to Dryden's *State of Innocence*, the libretto for an opera (never produced) based on *Paradise Lost*. Dryden had been ridiculed for the extravagant and bold imagery and rhetorical figures that are typical of the style of his rhymed heroic plays. This preface is a defense not only of his own predilection for what Samuel Johnson described as "wild and daring sallies of sentiment, in the irregular and eccentric violence of wit" but also of the theory that heroic and idealized materials should be treated in lofty and boldly metaphorical style; hence his definition of wit as propriety.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Court in which civil actions could be brought by one subject against another. "Chancery": a high court presided over by the lord chancellor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mechanical springs that set something in motion.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, such figures of speech as metaphors and similes. "Tropes": the uses of words in a figurative sense.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In the words of the French critic René Rapin, the rules (largely derived from Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Art of Poetry*) were made to "reduce Nature to method" (see Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* 1.88–89 [p. 523]).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Deliberate overstatement or exaggeration. "Catagoresis": the use of a word in a sense remote from its normal meaning.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: To find some means of agreement, in a third term, between the two opposites [Latin].[Return to reference 7](#)

# ***From A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire***<sup>1</sup>

## **[THE ART OF SATIRE]**

\* \* \* How easy is it to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave without using any of those opprobrious terms! To spare the grossness of the names, and to do the thing yet more severely, is to draw a full face, and to make the nose and cheeks stand out, and yet not to employ any depth of shadowing.<sup>2</sup> This is the mystery of that noble trade, which yet no master can teach to his apprentice; he may give the rules, but the scholar is never the nearer in his practice. Neither is it true that this fineness of raillery<sup>3</sup> is offensive. A witty man is tickled while he is hurt in this manner, and a fool feels it not. The occasion of an offense may possibly be given, but he cannot take it. If it be granted that in effect this way does more mischief; that a man is secretly wounded, and though he be not sensible himself, yet the malicious world will find it out for him; yet there is still a vast difference betwixt the slovenly butchering of a man, and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place. A man may be capable, as Jack Ketch's<sup>4</sup> wife said of his servant, of a plain piece of work, a bare hanging; but to make a malefactor die sweetly was only belonging to her husband. I wish I could apply it to myself, if the reader would be kind enough to think it belongs to me. The character of Zimri in my *Absalom*<sup>5</sup> is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem: it is not bloody, but it is ridiculous enough; and he, for whom it was intended, was too witty to resent it as an injury. If I had railed,<sup>6</sup> I might have suffered for it justly; but I managed my own work more happily, perhaps more dexterously. I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blindsides, and little

extravagancies; to which, the wittier a man is, he is generally the more obnoxious.<sup>7</sup> It succeeded as I wished; the jest went round, and he was laughed at in his turn who began the frolic. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

1693

- Note 1:  
This passage is an excerpt from the long and rambling preface that served as the dedication of a translation of the satires of the Roman satirists Juvenal and Persius to Charles Sackville, sixth Earl of Dorset. The translations were made by Dryden and other writers, among them William Congreve. Dryden traces the origin and development of verse satire in Rome and in a very fine passage contrasts Horace and Juvenal as satiric poets. It is plain that he prefers the “tragic” satire of Juvenal to the urbane and laughing satire of Horace. But in the passage printed here, he praises his own satiric character of Zimri (the Duke of Buckingham) in *Absalom and Achitophel* for the very reason that it is modeled on Horatian “raillery,” not Juvenalian invective.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Early English miniaturists prided themselves on the art of giving roundness to the full face without painting in shadows.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Satirical mirth, good-natured satire.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A notorious public executioner of Dryden’s time (d. 1686). His name later became a generic term for all members of his profession.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: *Absalom and Achitophel*, lines 544–68 (pp. 47–48).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Reviled, abused. Observe that the verb differed in meaning from its noun, defined above.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Liable.[Return to reference 7](#)

# **SAMUEL PEPYS**

## **1633–1703**

Samuel Pepys (pronounced "Peeps") was the son of a London tailor. With the help of a scholarship he took a degree at Cambridge; with the help of a cousin he found a place in the Navy Office. Eventually, through hard work and an eye for detail, he rose to secretary of the Admiralty. His defense of the Navy Office and himself before Parliament in 1668 won him a reputation as a good administrator, and his career continued to prosper until it was broken, first by false accusations of treason in 1679 and finally by the fall of James II in 1688. But Pepys was more than a bureaucrat. A Londoner to his core, he was interested in all the activities of the city: the theater, music, the social whirl, business, religion, literary life, and the scientific experiments of the Royal Society (of which he served as president from 1684 to 1686). He also found plenty of chances to indulge his two obsessions: chasing after women and making money.

Pepys kept his diary from 1660 to 1669 (when his eyesight began to fail). Writing in shorthand and sometimes in code, he was utterly frank in recording the events of his day, both public and private, the major affairs of state or his quarrels with his wife. Altogether he wrote about 1.3 million words. When the diary was first deciphered and published in the nineteenth century, it made him newly famous. As a document of social history, it is unsurpassed for its rich detail, honesty, and immediacy. But more than that, it gives us a sense of

somebody else's world: what it was like to live in the Restoration,  
and what it was like to see through the eyes of Pepys.

## ***From The Diary***



## [THE GREAT FIRE]

*September 2, 1666*

*Lords day.* Some of our maids sitting up late last night to get things ready against our feast today, Jane called us up, about 3 in the morning, to tell us of a great fire they saw in the City.<sup>1</sup> So I rose, and slipped on my nightgown and went to her window, and thought it to be on the back side of Mark Lane<sup>2</sup> at the furthest; but being unused to such fires as followed, I thought it far enough off, and so went to bed again and to sleep. About 7 rose again to dress myself, and there looked out at the window and saw the fire not so much as it was, and further off. So to my closet<sup>3</sup> to set things to rights after yesterday's cleaning. By and by Jane comes and tells me that she hears that above 300 houses have been burned down tonight by the fire we saw, and that it was now burning down all Fish Street by London Bridge. So I made myself ready presently,<sup>4</sup> and walked to the Tower and there got up upon one of the high places, Sir J. Robinson's little son going up with me; and there I did see the houses at that end of the bridge all on fire, and an infinite great fire on this and the other side the end of the bridge—which, among other people, did trouble me for poor little Michell and our Sarah<sup>5</sup> on the Bridge. So down, with my heart full of trouble, to the Lieutenant of the Tower, who tells me that it begun this morning in the King's baker's house in Pudding Lane, and that it hath burned down St. Magnus' Church and most part of Fish Street already. So I down to the waterside and there got a boat and through bridge, and there saw a lamentable fire. Poor Michell's house, as far as the Old Swan,<sup>6</sup> already burned that way and the fire running further, that in a very little time it got as far as the Steelyard while I was there. Everybody endeavoring to remove their goods, and flinging into the river or bringing them into lighters<sup>7</sup> that lay off. Poor people staying in their houses as long as till the very fire touched them, and then running into boats or clambering from one pair of stair by the waterside to

another. And among other things, the poor pigeons I perceive were loath to leave their houses, but hovered about the windows and balconies till they were some of them burned, their wings, and fell down.

Having stayed, and in an hour's time seen the fire rage every way, and nobody to my sight endeavoring to quench it, but to remove their goods and leave all to the fire; and having seen it get as far as the Steelyard, and the wind mighty high and driving it into the city, and everything, after so long a drought, proving combustible, even the very stones of churches, and among other things, the poor steeple by which pretty Mrs. <sup>8</sup> lives, and whereof my old school-fellow Elborough is parson, taken fire in the very top and there burned till it fell down—I to Whitehall<sup>9</sup> with a gentleman with me who desired to go off from the Tower to see the fire in my boat—to Whitehall, and there up to the King's closet in the chapel, where people came about me and I did give them an account dismayed them all; and word was carried in to the King, so I was called for and did tell the King and Duke of York what I saw, and that unless his Majesty did command houses to be pulled down, nothing could stop the fire. They seemed much troubled, and the King commanded me to go to my Lord Mayor from him and command him to spare no houses but to pull down before the fire every way. The Duke of York bid me tell him that if he would have any more soldiers, he shall; and so did my Lord Arlington afterward, as a great secret. Here meeting with Captain Cocke, I in his coach, which he lent me, and Creed with me, to Paul's;<sup>1</sup> and there walked along Watling Street as well as I could, every creature coming away laden with goods to save—and here and there sick people carried away in beds. Extraordinary good goods carried in carts and on backs. At last met my Lord Mayor in Canning Street, like a man spent, with a hankercher <sup>2</sup> about his neck. To the King's message, he cried like a fainting woman, "Lord, what can I do? I am spent. People will not obey me. I have been pulling down houses. But the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it." That he needed no more soldiers; and that for himself, he must go and refresh himself, having

been up all night. So he left me, and I him, and walked home—seeing people all almost distracted and no manner of means used to quench the fire. The houses too, so very thick thereabouts, and full of matter for burning, as pitch and tar, in Thames Street—and warehouses of oil and wines and brandy and other things. Here I saw Mr. Isaak Houblon, that handsome man—prettily dressed and dirty at his door at Dowgate, receiving some of his brothers' things whose houses were on fire; and as he says, have been removed twice already, and he doubts<sup>3</sup> (as it soon proved) that they must be in a little time removed from his house also—which was a sad consideration. And to see the churches all filling with goods, by people who themselves should have been quietly there at this time.

By this time it was about 12 o'clock, and so home and there find my guests, which was Mr. Wood and his wife, Barbary Shelden, and also Mr. Moone—she mighty fine, and her husband, for aught I see, a likely<sup>4</sup> man. But Mr. Moone's design and mine, which was to look over my closet and please him with the sight thereof, which he hath long desired, was wholly disappointed, for we were in great trouble and disturbance at this fire, not knowing what to think of it. However, we had an extraordinary good dinner, and as merry as at this time we could be.

While at dinner, Mrs. Batelier came to enquire after Mr. Woolfe and Stanes (who it seems are related to them), whose houses in Fish Street are all burned, and they in a sad condition. She would not stay in the fright.

As soon as dined, I and Moone away and walked through the City, the streets full of nothing but people and horses and carts loaden with goods, ready to run over one another, and removing goods from one burned house to another—they now removing out of Canning Street (which received goods in the morning) into Lombard Street and further; and among others, I now saw my little goldsmith Stokes receiving some friend's goods, whose house itself was burned the day after. We parted at Paul's, he home and I to Paul's Wharf, where I had appointed a boat to attend me; and took in Mr. Carcasse and his brother, whom I met in the street, and carried

them below and above bridge, to and again, to see the fire, which was now got further, both below and above, and no likelihood of stopping it. Met with the King and Duke of York in their barge, and with them to Queenhithe and there called Sir Rd. Browne<sup>5</sup> to them. Their order was only to pull down houses apace, and so below bridge at the waterside; but little was or could be done, the fire coming upon them so fast. Good hopes there was of stopping it at the Three Cranes above, and at Buttolph's Wharf below bridge, if care be used; but the wind carries it into the City, so as we know not by the waterside what it doth there. River full of lighters and boats taking in goods, and good goods swimming in the water; and only, I observed that hardly one lighter or boat in three that had the goods of a house in, but there was a pair of virginals<sup>6</sup> in it. Having seen as much as I could now, I away to Whitehall by appointment, and there walked to St. James's Park, and there met my wife and Creed and Wood and his wife and walked to my boat, and there upon the water again, and to the fire up and down, it still increasing and the wind great. So near the fire as we could for smoke; and all over the Thames, with one's face in the wind you were almost burned with a shower of firedrops—this is very true—so as houses were burned by these drops and flakes of fire, three or four, nay five or six houses, one from another. When we could endure no more upon the water, we to a little alehouse on the Bankside over against the Three Cranes, and there stayed till it was dark almost and saw the fire grow; and as it grew darker, appeared more and more, and in corners and upon steeples and between churches and houses, as far as we could see up the hill of the City, in a most horrid malicious bloody flame, not like the fine flame of an ordinary fire. Barbary<sup>7</sup> and her husband away before us. We stayed till, it being darkish, we saw the fire as only one entire arch of fire from this to the other side the bridge, and in a bow up the hill, for an arch of above a mile long. It made me weep to see it. The churches, houses, and all on fire and flaming at once, and a horrid noise the flames made, and the cracking of houses at their ruin. So home with a sad heart, and there find everybody discoursing and lamenting the fire; and poor

Tom Hater came with some few of his goods saved out of his house, which is burned upon Fish Street hill. I invited him to lie at my house, and did receive his goods: but was deceived in his lying there,<sup>8</sup> the noise coming every moment of the growth of the fire, so as we were forced to begin to pack up our own goods and prepare for their removal. And did by moonshine (it being brave,<sup>9</sup> dry, and moonshine and warm weather) carry much of my goods into the garden, and Mr. Hater and I did remove my money and iron chests into my cellar—as thinking that the safest place. And got my bags of gold into my office ready to carry away, and my chief papers of accounts also there, and my tallies<sup>1</sup> into a box by themselves. So great was our fear, as Sir W. Batten had carts come out of the country to fetch away his goods this night. We did put Mr. Hater, poor man, to bed a little; but he got but very little rest, so much noise being in my house, taking down of goods.

*September 5, 1666*

I lay down in the office again upon W. Hewer's<sup>2</sup> quilt, being mighty weary and sore in my feet with going till I was hardly able to stand. About 2 in the morning my wife calls me up and tells of new cries of "Fire!"—it being come to Barking Church, which is the bottom of our lane. I up; and finding it so, resolved presently to take her away; and did, and took my gold (which was about £2350), W. Hewer, and Jane down by Poundy's boat to Woolwich.<sup>3</sup> But Lord, what a sad sight it was by moonlight to see the whole City almost on fire—that you might see it plain at Woolwich, as if you were by it. There when I came, I find the gates shut, but no guard kept at all; which troubled me, because of discourses now begun that there is plot in it and that the French had done it.<sup>4</sup> I got the gates open, and to Mr. Sheldon's,<sup>5</sup> where I locked up my gold and charged my wife and W. Hewer never to leave the room without one of them in it night nor day. So back again, by the way seeing my goods well in the lighters at Deptford and watched well by people. Home, and whereas I expected to have seen our house on fire, it being now about 7 o'clock, it was not. But to the fire, and there find greater

hopes than I expected; for my confidence of finding our office on fire was such, that I durst not ask anybody how it was with us, till I came and saw it not burned. But going to the fire, I find, by the blowing up of houses and the great help given by the workmen out of the King's yards, sent up by Sir W. Penn, there is a good stop given to it, as well at Mark Lane end as ours—it having only burned the dial<sup>6</sup> of Barking Church, and part of the porch, and was there quenched. I up to the top of Barking steeple, and there saw the saddest sight of desolation that I ever saw. Everywhere great fires. Oil cellars and brimstone and other things burning. I became afear'd to stay there long; and therefore down again as fast as I could, the fire being spread as far as I could see it, and to Sir W. Penn's and there eat a piece of cold meat, having eaten nothing since Sunday but the remains of Sunday's dinner.

Here I met with Mr. Young and Whistler; and having removed all my things, and received good hopes that the fire at our end is stopped, they and I walked into the town and find Fanchurch Street, Gracious Street, and Lumbard Street all in dust. The Exchange a sad sight, nothing standing there of all the statues or pillars but Sir Tho. Gresham's picture in the corner.<sup>7</sup> Walked into Moore-fields (our feet ready to burn, walking through the town among the hot coals) and find that full of people, and poor wretches carrying their goods there, and everybody keeping his goods together by themselves (and a great blessing it is to them that it is fair weather for them to keep abroad<sup>8</sup> night and day); drank there, and paid twopence for a plain penny loaf.

Thence homeward, having passed through Cheapside and Newgate Market, all burned—and seen Anthony Joyce's house in fire. And took up (which I keep by me) a piece of glass of Mercer's Chapel in the street, where much more was, so melted and buckled with the heat of the fire, like parchment. I also did see a poor cat taken out of a hole in the chimney joining to the wall of the Exchange, with the hair all burned off the body and yet alive. So home at night, and find there good hopes of saving our office—but great endeavors of watching all night and having men ready; and so

we lodged them in the office and had drink and bread and cheese for them. And I lay down and slept a good night about midnight—though when I rose, I hear that there had been a great alarm of French and Dutch being risen—which proved nothing. But it is a strange thing to see how long this time did look since Sunday, having been always full of variety of actions, and little sleep, that it looked like a week or more. And I had forgot almost the day of the week.<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The Fire of London, which was to destroy four-fifths of the central city, had begun an hour earlier. For another description see Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* (p. 32). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Near Pepys's own house in Seething Lane. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A small private room or study. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Immediately. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: William Michell and his wife, Betty, one of Pepys's old flames, lived near London Bridge. Sarah had been a maid of the Pepyses'. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A tavern in Thames Street, near the source of the fire. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Barges. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Mrs. Horsely, a beauty admired and pursued by Pepys. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Palace in central London. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: St. Paul's Cathedral, later ravaged by the fire. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Handkerchief. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fears. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Promising. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sir Richard Browne was a former lord mayor. Queenhithe is a harbor in Thames Street. [Return to reference 5](#)



- Note 6: Table-size harpsichord, popular at the time.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The actress Elizabeth Knepp, another of Pepys's mistresses. He calls her "Barbary" because she had enchanted him by singing *Barbary Allen*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, mistaken in asking him to stay.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Fine.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Receipts notched on sticks.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: William Hewer, Pepys's chief clerk. Pepys had packed or sent away all his own goods.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Suburb on the east side of London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: There were rumors that the French had set the fire and were invading the city.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: William Sheldon, a Woolwich official at whose home Mrs. Pepys had stayed the year before, during the plague. "Gates": at the dockyard.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Clock. "Yards": dockyards.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sir Thomas Gresham had founded the Royal Exchange, a center for shopping and trading, in 1568. It was rebuilt in 1669.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Out of doors.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A day later the fire was under control. Pepys' own house was spared.[Return to reference 9](#)



[THE DEB WILLET AFFAIR]

*October 25, 1668*

*Lords day.* Up, and discoursing with my wife about our house and many new things we are doing of; and so to church I, and there find Jack Fen come, and his wife, a pretty black<sup>1</sup> woman; I never saw her before, nor took notice of her now. So home and to dinner; and after dinner, all the afternoon got my wife and boy<sup>2</sup> to read to me. And at night W. Batelier comes and sups with us; and after supper, to have my head combed by Deb,<sup>3</sup> which occasioned the greatest sorrow to me that ever I knew in this world; for my wife, coming up suddenly, did find me embracing the girl con my hand sub su coats; and indeed, I was with my main in her cunny.<sup>4</sup> I was at a wonderful loss upon it, and the girl also; and I endeavored to put it off, but my wife was struck mute and grew angry, and as her voice came to her, grew quite out of order; and I do say little, but to bed; and my wife said little also, but could not sleep all night; but about 2 in the morning waked me and cried, and fell to tell me as a great secret that she was a Roman Catholic and had received the Holy Sacrament;<sup>5</sup> which troubled me but I took no notice of it, but she went on from one thing to another, till at last it appeared plainly her trouble was at what she saw; but yet I did not know how much she saw and therefore said nothing to her. But after her much crying and reproaching me with inconstancy and preferring a sorry girl before her, I did give her no provocations but did promise all fair usage to her, and love, and foreswore any hurt that I did with her—till at last she seemed to be at ease again; and so toward morning, a little sleep; [*Oct. 26*] and so I, with some little repose and rest, rose, and up and by water to Whitehall, but with my mind mightily troubled for the poor girl, whom I fear I have undone by this, my wife telling me that she would turn her out of door. However, I was obliged to attend the Duke of York, thinking to have had a meeting of Tanger<sup>6</sup> today, but had not; but he did take me and Mr. Wren into his closet,

and there did press me to prepare what I had to say upon the answers of my fellow-officers to his great letter; which I promised to do against<sup>7</sup> his coming to town again the next week; and so to other discourse, finding plainly that he is in trouble and apprehensions of the reformers, and would be found to do what he can towards reforming himself. And so thence to my Lord Sandwich; where after long stay, he being in talk with others privately, I to him; and there he taking physic and keeping his chamber, I had an hour's talk with him about the ill posture of things at this time, while the King gives countenance to Sir Ch. Sidly and Lord Buckhurst,<sup>8</sup> telling him their late story of running up and down the streets a little while since all night, and their being beaten and clapped up all night by the constable, who is since chid and imprisoned for his pains.

He tells me that he thinks his matters do stand well with the King—and hopes to have dispatch to his mind;<sup>9</sup> but I doubt it, and do see that he doth fear it too. He told me my Lady Carteret's trouble about my writing of that letter of the Duke of York's lately to the office; which I did not own, but declared to be of no injury to G. Carteret<sup>1</sup> and that I would write a letter to him to satisfy him therein. But this I am in pain how to do without doing myself wrong, and the end I had, of preparing a justification to myself hereafter, when the faults of the Navy come to be found out. However, I will do it in the best manner I can.

Thence by coach home and to dinner, finding my wife mightily discontented and the girl sad, and no words from my wife to her. So after dinner, they out<sup>2</sup> with me about two or three things; and so home again, I all the evening busy and my wife full of trouble in her looks; and anon to bed—where about midnight, she wakes me and there falls foul on me again, affirming that she saw me hug and kiss the girl; the latter I denied, and truly; the other I confessed and no more. And upon her pressing me, did offer to give her under my hand that I would never see Mrs. Pierce more, nor Knepp, but did promise her particular demonstrations of my true love to her, owning some indiscretion in what I did, but that there was no harm in it. She at last on these promises was quiet, and very kind we were, and

so to sleep; [*Oct. 27*] and in the morning up, but with my mind troubled for the poor girl, with whom I could not get opportunity to speak; but to the office, my mind mighty full of sorrow for her, where all the morning, and to dinner with my people and to the office all the afternoon; and so at night home and there busy to get some things ready against tomorrow's meeting of Tanger; and that being done and my clerks gone, my wife did towards bedtime begin to be in a mighty rage from some new matter that she had got in her head, and did most part of the night in bed rant at me in most high terms, of threats of publishing<sup>3</sup> my shame; and when I offered to rise, would have rose too, and caused a candle to be lit, to burn by her all night in the chimney while she ranted; while I, that knew myself to have given some grounds for it, did make it my business to appease her all I could possibly, and by good words and fair promises did make her very quiet; and so rested all night and rose with perfect good peace, being heartily afflicted for this folly of mine that did occasion it; but was forced to be silent about the girl, which I have no mind to part with, but much less that the poor girl should be undone by my folly. [*Oct. 28*] So up, with mighty kindness from my wife and a thorough peace; and being up, did by a note advise the girl what I had done and owned, which note I was in pain for till she told me that she had burned it. This evening, Mr. Spong came and sat late with me, and first told me of the instrument called Parrallogram,<sup>4</sup> which I must have one of, showing me his practice thereon by a map of England.

*November 14, 1668*

Up, and had a mighty mind to have seen or given a note to Deb or to have given her a little money; to which purpose I wrapped up 40s in a paper, thinking to give her; but my wife rose presently, and would not let me be out of her sight; and went down before me into the kitchen, and came up and told me that she was in the kitchen, and therefore would have me go round the other way; which she repeating, and I vexed at it, answered her a little angrily; upon which she instantly flew out into a rage, calling me dog and rogue,

and that I had a rotten heart; all which, knowing that I deserved it, I bore with; and word being brought presently up that she was gone away by coach with her things, my wife was friends; and so all quiet, and I to the office with my heart sad, and find that I cannot forget the girl, and vexed I know not where to look for her—and more troubled to see how my wife is by this means likely for ever to have her hand over me, that I shall for ever be a slave to her; that is to say, only in matters of pleasure, but in other things she will make her business, I know, to please me and to keep me right to her—which I will labor to be indeed, for she deserves it of me, though it will be I fear a little time before I shall be able to wear Deb out of my mind. At the office all the morning, and merry at noon at dinner; and after dinner to the office, where all the afternoon and doing much business late; my mind being free of all troubles, I thank God, but<sup>5</sup> only for my thoughts of this girl, which hang after her. And so at night home to supper, and there did sleep with great content with my wife. I must here remember that I have lain with my moher<sup>6</sup> as a husband more times since this falling-out then in I believe twelve months before—and with more pleasure to her then I think in all the time of our marriage before.

*November 18, 1668*

Lay long in bed, talking with my wife, she being unwilling to have me go abroad, being and declaring herself jealous of my going out, for fear of my going to Deb; which I do deny—for which God forgive me, for I was no sooner out about noon but I did go by coach directly to Somerset House and there inquired among the porters there for Dr. Allbun;<sup>7</sup> and the first I spoke with told me he knew him, and that he was newly gone into Lincoln's Inn fields, but whither he could not tell me, but that one of his fellows, not then in the way, did carry a chest of drawers thither with him, and that when he comes he would ask him. This put me in some hopes; and I to Whitehall and thence to Mr. Povy's, but he at dinner; and therefore I away and walked up and down the Strand between the two turnstiles,<sup>8</sup> hoping to see her out of a window; and then employed a

porter, one Osbeston, to find out this doctor's lodgings thereabouts; who by appointment comes to me to Hercules' Pillars, where I dined alone, but tells me that he cannot find out any such but will inquire further. Thence back to Whitehall to the treasury a while, and thence to the Strand; and towards night did meet with the porter that carried the chest of drawers with this doctor, but he would not tell me where he lived, being his good master he told me; but if I would have a message to him, he would deliver it. At last, I told him my business was not with him, but a little gentlewoman, one Mrs. Willet, that is with him; and sent him to see how she did, from her friend in London, and no other token. He goes while I walk in Somerset House walk there in the court; at last he comes back and tells me she is well, and that I may see her if I will—but no more. So I could not be commanded by my reason, but I must go this very night; and so by coach, it being now dark, I to her, close by my tailor's; and there she came into the coach to me, and yo did besar her and tocar her thing, but ella was against it and labored with much earnestness, such as I believed to be real; and yet at last yo did make her tener mi cosa in her mano, while mi mano was sopra her pectus, and so did hazer<sup>9</sup> with grand delight. I did nevertheless give her the best counsel I could, to have a care of her honor and to fear God and suffer no man para haver to do con her—as yo have done—which she promised. Yo did give her 20s and directions para laisser sealed in paper at any time the name of the place of her being, at Herringman's my bookseller in the Change<sup>1</sup>—by which I might go para her. And so bid her good-night, with much content to my mind and resolution to look after her no more till I heard from her. And so home, and there told my wife a fair tale, God knows, how I spent the whole day; with which the poor wretch was satisfied, or at least seemed so; and so to supper and to bed, she having been mighty busy all day in getting of her house in order against tomorrow, to hang up our new hangings and furnishing our best chamber.

*November 19, 1668*

Up, and at the office all the morning, with my heart full of joy to think in what a safe condition all my matters now stand between my wife and Deb and me; and at noon, running upstairs to see the upholsters, who are at work upon hanging my best room and setting up my new bed, I find my wife sitting sad in the dining-room; which inquiring into the reason of, she begun to call me all the false, rotten-hearted rogues in the world, letting me understand that I was with Deb yesterday; which, thinking impossible for her ever to understand, I did a while deny; but at last did, for the ease of my mind and hers, and for ever to discharge my heart of this wicked business, I did confess all; and above-stairs in our bed-chamber there, I did endure the sorrow of her threats and vows and curses all the afternoon. And which was worst, she swore by all that was good that she would slit the nose of this girl, and be gone herself this very night from me; and did there demand 3 or 400/ of me to buy my peace, that she might be gone without making any noise, or else protested that she would make all the world know of it. So, with most perfect confusion of face and heart, and sorrow and shame, in the greatest agony in the world, I did pass this afternoon, fearing that it will never have an end; but at last I did call for W. Hewer, who I was forced to make privy now to all; and the poor fellow did cry like a child and obtained what I could not, that she would be pacified, upon condition that I would give it under my hand never to see or speak with Deb while I live, as I did before of Pierce and Knepp; and which I did also, God knows, promise for Deb too, but I have the confidence to deny it, to the perjuring of myself. So before it was late, there was, beyond my hopes as well as desert, a tolerable peace; and so to supper, and pretty kind words, and to bed, and there yo did hazer con ella to her content; and so with some rest spent the night in bed, being most absolutely resolved, if ever I can master this bout, never to give her occasion while I live of more trouble of this or any other kind, there being no curse in the world so great as this of the difference between myself and her; and therefore I do by the grace of God promise never to offend her more, and did this night begin to pray to God upon my knees alone in my chamber; which God knows I cannot yet do heartily, but I

hope God will give me the grace more and more every day to fear Him, and to be true to my poor wife. This night the upholsters did finish the hanging of my best chamber, but my sorrow and trouble is so great about this business, that put me out of all joy in looking upon it or minding how it was.<sup>2</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Dark-haired.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Servant. Pepys had no children.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Deborah Willett, Mrs. Pepys's maid.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: With his hand under her skirts and in her vulva.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: When unhappy with her husband, Elizabeth Pepys sometimes threatened to convert to the Church of Rome. She never did.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Committee supervising the British naval base at Tangier, later evacuated under Pepys's supervision.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Before. Pepys had drafted a letter for the Duke of York (later James II), high admiral of the navy, defending him from charges of mismanagement.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sir Charles Sedley and Lord Buckhurst were riotous rakes and well-known writers; they are often identified with Lisideius and Eugenius in Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (pp. 68–70).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A message to his liking.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sir George Carteret, former treasurer of the navy (which Pepys had plans to reform), was later censured for having kept poor accounts.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Went out.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Making public.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The pantograph, a mechanism for copying maps or plans.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Except.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Woman or wife (*mujer* in Spanish). [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pepys' wife had told him that Deb was staying with a man named Allbon. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: To keep traffic, except for pedestrians, out of the street. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Carry on. "Besar": kiss. "Tocar": touch. "Ella": she. "Tener mi cosa in her mano": take my thing in her hand. "Mi mano was sobre her pectus": my hand was on her breast. Pepys often used other languages when describing sexual encounters. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Royal Exchange, a center for shopping, business, and trade. "Para laisser": to leave. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Despite his promises, Pepys continued to hanker for Deb, and they had a few brief encounters. Mrs. Pepys accused him of talking to Deb in his dreams, and she once threatened him with red-hot tongs. But so far as is known the affair was never consummated. [Return to reference 2](#)



# JOHN BUNYAN

## 1628–1688

John Bunyan is one of the most remarkable figures in seventeenth-century literature. The son of a poor Bedfordshire tinker (a maker and mender of metal pots), he received only meager schooling and then learned his father's craft. Nothing in the circumstances of his early life could have suggested that he would become a writer known the world over.

*Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), his spiritual autobiography, records his transformation from a self-doubting sinner into an eloquent and fearless Baptist preacher. Preachers, both men and women, often even less educated than Bunyan, were common phenomena among the sects during the Commonwealth. They wished no ordination but the "call," and they could dispense with learning because they abounded in inspiration, inner light, and the gifts conferred by the Holy Spirit. In November 1660, the Anglican Church began to persecute and silence the dissenting sects. Jails filled with unlicensed Nonconformist preachers, and Bunyan was one of the prisoners. Refusing to keep silent, he chose imprisonment and so for twelve years remained in Bedford jail, preaching to his fellow prisoners and writing religious books. Upon his release, he was called to the pastorate of a Nonconformist group in Bedford. It was during a second imprisonment, in 1675, when the Test Act was once again rigorously enforced against Nonconformists, that he wrote his greatest work, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This*

*World to That Which Is to Come* (1678), revised and augmented in the third edition (1679). Bunyan was a prolific writer: part 2 of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, dealing with the journey of Christian's wife and children, appeared in 1684; *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, in 1680; *The Holy War*, in 1682. And these major works form only a small part of all his writings.

*The Pilgrim's Progress* was long the most popular allegory in English. Its basic metaphor—life is a journey—is simple and familiar; the objects that the pilgrim Christian meets are homely and commonplace: a quagmire, the highway, the bypaths and shortcuts through pleasant meadows, the inn, the steep hill, the town fair on market day, and the river that must be forded. As in the equally homely parables of Jesus, however, these simple things are charged with spiritual significance. Moreover, this is a tale of adventure. If the road that Christian travels is the King's Highway, it is also a perilous path along which we encounter giants, wild beasts, hobgoblins, and the terrible Apollyon, "the angel of the bottomless pit," whom Christian must fight. Bunyan keeps the tale firmly based on human experience, and his style, modeled on the prose of the English Bible, together with his concrete language and carefully observed details, enables even the simplest reader to share the experiences of the characters. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is no longer a household book, but it survives in the phrases it gave to our language: "the slough of despond," "the house beautiful," "Mr. Worldly-Wiseman," and "Vanity Fair."

# ***From The Pilgrim's Progress***

***From This World to That Which Is to Come: Delivered under  
the Similitude of a Dream***

## [CHRISTIAN SETS OUT FOR THE CELESTIAL CITY]

As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep; and, as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back (Isaiah lxiv.6; Luke xiv.33; Psalms xxxviii.4; Habakkuk ii.2; Acts xvi.31). I looked and saw him open the book and read therein; and, as he read, he wept, and trembled; and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, "What shall I do?" (Acts ii.37).

In this plight, therefore, he went home and refrained himself as long as he could, that his wife and children should not perceive his distress; but he could not be silent long, because that his trouble increased. Wherefore at length he brake his mind to his wife and children; and thus he began to talk to them. O my dear wife, said he, and you the children of my bowels, I your dear friend am in myself undone by reason of a burden that lieth hard upon me; moreover, I am for certain informed that this our city will be burned with fire from heaven, in which fearful overthrow both myself, with thee, my wife, and you, my sweet babes, shall miserably come to ruin, except (the which yet I see not) some way of escape can be found, whereby we may be delivered. At this his relations were sore amazed; not for that they believed that what he had said to them was true, but because they thought that some frenzy distemper<sup>1</sup> had got into his head; therefore, it drawing towards night, and they hoping that sleep might settle his brains, with all haste they got him to bed; but the night was as troublesome to him as the day; wherefore, instead of sleeping, he spent it in sighs and tears. So when the morning was come, they would know how he did. He told them, Worse and worse; he also set to talking to them again, but they began to be hardened. They also thought to drive away his distemper by harsh and surly carriages<sup>2</sup> to him: sometimes they would deride, sometimes they would chide, and sometimes they

would quite neglect him. Wherefore he began to retire himself to his chamber, to pray for and pity them, and also to condole his own misery; he would also walk solitarily in the fields, sometimes reading, and sometimes praying; and thus for some days he spent his time.

Now I saw, upon a time, when he was walking in the fields, that he was (as he was wont) reading in this book, and greatly distressed in his mind; and as he read, he burst out, as he had done before, crying, "What shall I do to be saved?"

I saw also that he looked this way and that way, as if he would run; yet he stood still, because (as I perceived) he could not tell which way to go. I looked then, and saw a man named Evangelist<sup>3</sup> coming to him, who asked, Wherefore dost thou cry? (Job xxxiii.23). He answered, Sir, I perceive by the book in my hand that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment (Hebrews ix.27), and I find that I am not willing to do the first (Job xvi.21), nor able to do the second (Ezekiel xxii.14). . . .

Then said Evangelist, Why not willing to die, since this life is attended with so many evils? The man answered, Because I fear that this burden that is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave, and I shall fall into Tophet<sup>4</sup> (Isaiah xxx.33). And, sir, if I be not fit to go to prison, I am not fit to go to judgment, and from thence to execution; and the thoughts of these things make me cry.<sup>5</sup>

Then said Evangelist, If this be thy condition, why standest thou still? He answered, Because I know not whither to go. Then he gave him a parchment roll, and there was written within, "Fly from the wrath to come" (Matthew iii.7).

The man therefore read it, and looking upon Evangelist very carefully,<sup>6</sup> said, Whither must I fly? Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder wicketgate?<sup>7</sup> (Matthew vii. 13, 14.) The man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining light? (Psalms cxix.105; II Peter i.19.) He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto; so shalt thou see the gate; at which when thou knockest it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.

So I saw in my dream that the man began to run. Now, he had not run far from his own door, but his wife and children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on, crying, Life! life! eternal life! (Luke xiv.26). So he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the plain (Genesis xix.17).

The neighbors also came out to see him run (Jeremiah xx.10); and as he ran some mocked, others threatened, and some cried after him to return; and, among those that did so, there were two that resolved to fetch him back by force. The name of the one was Obstinate, and the name of the other Pliable. Now by this time the man was got a good distance from them; but, however, they were resolved to pursue him, which they did, and in a little time they overtook him. Then said the man, Neighbors, wherefore are ye come? They said, To persuade you to go back with us. But he said, That can by no means be; you dwell, said he, in the City of Destruction (the place also where I was born) I see it to be so; and, dying there, sooner or later, you will sink lower than the grave, into a place that burns with fire and brimstone; be content, good neighbors, and go along with me.

OBST. What! said Obstinate, and leave our friends and our comforts behind us?

CHR. Yes, said Christian (for that was his name), because that ALL which you shall forsake is not worthy to be compared with a little of that which I am seeking to enjoy (II Corinthians v.17); and, if you will go along with me, and hold it, you shall fare as I myself; for there, where I go, is enough and to spare (Luke xv.17). Come away, and prove my words.

OBST. What are the things you seek, since you leave all the world to find them?

CHR. I seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away (I Peter i.4), and it is laid up in heaven, and safe there (Hebrews xi.16), to be bestowed, at the time appointed, on them that diligently seek it. Read it so, if you will, in my book.

OBST. Tush! said Obstinate, away with your book; will you go back with us or no?

CHR. No, not I, said the other, because I have laid my hand to the plow (Luke ix.62).

OBST. Come, then, neighbor Pliable, let us turn again, and go home without him; there is a company of these crazed-headed coxcombs, that, when they take a fancy<sup>8</sup> by the end, are wiser in their own eyes than seven men that can render a reason (Proverbs xxvi.16).

PLI. Then said Pliable, Don't revile; if what the good Christian says is true, the things he looks after are better than ours; my heart inclines to go with my neighbor.

OBST. What! more fools still? Be ruled by me, go back; who knows whither such a brain-sick fellow will lead you? Go back, go back, and be wise.

CHR. Nay, but do thou come with thy neighbor, Pliable; there are such things to be had which I spoke of, and many more glories besides. If you believe not me, read here in this book; and for the truth of what is expressed therein, behold, all is confirmed by the blood of Him that made it (Hebrews ix.17–22; xiii.20).

PLI. Well, neighbor Obstinate, said Pliable, I begin to come to a point,<sup>9</sup> I intend to go along with this good man, and to cast in my lot with him: but, my good companion, do you know the way to this desired place?

CHR. I am directed by a man, whose name is Evangelist, to speed me to a little gate that is before us, where we shall receive instructions about the way.

PLI. Come, then, good neighbor, let us be going. Then they went both together. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A malady causing madness. The use of *frenzy* as an adjective was not uncommon in the 17th century.[Return to](#)

[reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Behavior.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A preacher of the Gospel; literally, a bearer of good news.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The place near Jerusalem where bodies and filth were burned; hence, by association, a name for hell.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cry out.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sorrowfully.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A small gate in or beside a larger gate.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Delusion. "Coxcombs": fools.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Decision.[Return to reference 9](#)



## [THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND]

Now I saw in my dream, that just as they had ended this talk they drew near to a very miry slough,<sup>1</sup> that was in the midst of the plain; and they, being heedless, did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name of the slough was Despond. Here, therefore, they wallowed for a time, being grievously bedaubed with dirt; and Christian, because of the burden that was on his back, began to sink in the mire.

PLI. Then said Pliable, Ah, neighbor Christian, where are you now?

CHR. Truly, said Christian, I do not know.

PLI. At that Pliable began to be offended, and angrily said to his fellow, Is this the happiness you have told me all this while of? If we have such ill speed at our first setting out, what may we expect 'twixt this and our journey's end? May I get out again with my life, you shall possess the brave<sup>2</sup> country alone for me. And, with that, he gave a desperate struggle or two, and got out of the mire on that side of the slough which was next<sup>3</sup> to his own house: so away he went, and Christian saw him no more.

Wherefore Christian was left to tumble in the Slough of Despond alone: but still he endeavored to struggle to that side of the slough that was further from his own house, and next to the wicket-gate; the which he did, but could not get out, because of the burden that was upon his back: but I beheld in my dream, that a man came to him, whose name was Help, and asked him what he did there?

CHR. Sir, said Christian, I was bid go this way by a man called Evangelist, who directed me also to yonder gate, that I might escape the wrath to come; and as I was going thither I fell in here.

HELP. But why did not you look for the steps?

CHR. Fear followed me so hard that I fled the next way, and fell in.

HELP. Then said he, Give me thy hand; so he gave him his hand, and he drew him out, and set him upon sound ground, and bid him

go on his way.

Then I stepped to him that plucked him out, and said, Sir, wherefore, since over this place is the way from the City of Destruction to yonder gate, is it that this plat<sup>4</sup> is not mended, that poor travelers might go thither with more security? And he said unto me, This miry slough is such a place as cannot be mended; it is the descent whither the scum and filth that attends conviction for sin doth continually run, and therefore it was called the Slough of Despond; for still, as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there ariseth in his soul many fears, and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in his place. And this is the reason of the badness of this ground. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Swamp (pronounced to rhyme with *now*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fine.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Nearest.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A plot of ground.[Return to reference 4](#)

## [VANITY FAIR]<sup>5</sup>

Then I saw in my dream, that when they were got out of the wilderness, they presently saw a town before them, and the name of that town is Vanity; and at the town there is a fair kept, called Vanity Fair; it is kept all the year long; it beareth the name of Vanity Fair because the town where it is kept is lighter than vanity; and also because all that is there sold, or that cometh thither, is vanity. As is the saying of the wise, "All that cometh is vanity" (Ecclesiastes i.2, 14; ii.11, 17; xi.8; Isaiah xl.17).

This fair is no new-erected business, but a thing of ancient standing; I will show you the original of it.

Almost five thousand years ago, there were pilgrims walking to the Celestial City, as these two honest persons are; and Beelzebub, Apollyon, and Legion,<sup>6</sup> with their companions, perceiving by the path that the pilgrims made, that their way to the city lay through this town of Vanity, they contrived here to set up a fair; a fair wherein should be sold all sorts of vanity, and that it should last all the year long. Therefore at this fair are all such merchandise sold, as houses, lands, trades, places, honors, preferments,<sup>7</sup> titles, countries, kingdoms, lusts, pleasures, and delights of all sorts, as whores, bawds, wives, husbands, children, masters, servants, lives, blood, bodies, souls, silver, gold, pearls, precious stones, and what not.

And, moreover, at this fair there is at all times to be seen jugglings, cheats, games, plays, fools, apes, knaves, and rogues, and that of every kind.

Here are to be seen, too, and that for nothing, thefts, murders, adulteries, false swearers, and that of a blood-red color.

And as in other fairs of less moment, there are the several rows and streets, under their proper names, where such and such wares are vended; so here likewise you have the proper places, rows, streets (viz., countries and kingdoms), where the wares of this fair are soonest to be found. Here is the Britain Row, the French Row, the Italian Row, the Spanish Row, the German Row, where several

sorts of vanities are to be sold. But, as in other fairs, some one commodity is as the chief of all the fair, so the ware of Rome and her merchandise<sup>8</sup> is greatly promoted in this fair; only our English nation, with some others, have taken a dislike thereat.

Now, as I said, the way to the Celestial City lies just through this town where this lusty<sup>9</sup> fair is kept; and he that will go to the City, and yet not go through this town, must needs "go out of the world" (I Corinthians v.10). The Prince of princes himself, when here, went through this town to his own country, and that upon a fair-day too,<sup>1</sup> yea, and as I think, it was Beelzebub, the chief lord of this fair, that invited him to buy of his vanities; yea, would have made him lord of the fair, would he but have done him reverence as he went through the town. (Matthew iv.8; Luke iv.5–7.) Yea, because he was such a person of honor, Beelzebub had him from street to street, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a little time, that he might, if possible, allure the Blessed One to cheapen<sup>2</sup> and buy some of his vanities; but he had no mind to the merchandise, and therefore left the town, without laying out so much as one farthing upon these vanities. This fair, therefore, is an ancient thing, of long standing, and a very great fair.

Now these pilgrims, as I said, must needs go through this fair. Well, so they did; but, behold, even as they entered into the fair, all the people in the fair were moved, and the town itself as it were in a hubbub about them; and that for several reasons: for

First, The pilgrims were clothed with such kind of raiment as was diverse from the raiment of any that traded in that fair. The people, therefore, of the fair, made a great gazing upon them: some said they were fools, some they were bedlams, and some they are outlandish<sup>3</sup> men. (I Corinthians ii.7, 8).

Secondly, And as they wondered at their apparel, so they did likewise at their speech; for few could understand what they said; they naturally spoke the language of Canaan, but they that kept the fair were the men of this world; so that, from one end of the fair to the other, they seemed barbarians<sup>4</sup> each to the other.

Thirdly, But that which did not a little amuse the merchandisers was that these pilgrims set very light by all their wares; they cared not so much as to look upon them; and if they called upon them to buy, they would put their fingers in their ears, and cry, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity," and look upwards, signifying that their trade and traffic was in heaven. (Psalms cxix.37; Philippians iii.19, 20).

One chanced mockingly, beholding the carriages of the men, to say unto them, What will ye buy? But they, looking-gravely upon him, said, "We buy the truth" (Proverbs xxiii.23). At that there was an occasion taken to despise the men the more; some mocking, some taunting, some speaking reproachfully, and some calling upon others to smite them. At last things came to an hubbub and great stir in the fair, insomuch that all order was confounded. Now was word presently brought to the great one of the fair, who quickly came down, and deputed some of his most trusty friends to take these men into examination, about whom the fair was almost overturned. So the men were brought to examination; and they that sat upon them<sup>5</sup> asked them whence they came, whither they went, and what they did there, in such an unusual garb? The men told them that they were pilgrims and strangers in the world, and that they were going to their own country, which was the Heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews xi.13–16); and that they had given no occasion to the men of the town, nor yet to the merchandisers, thus to abuse them, and to let<sup>6</sup> them in their journey, except it was for that, when one asked them what they would buy, they said they would buy the truth. But they that were appointed to examine them did not believe them to be any other than bedlams and mad, or else such as came to put all things into a confusion in the fair. Therefore they took them and beat them, and besmeared them with dirt, and then put them into the cage, that they might be made a spectacle to all the men of the fair. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 5:

In this, perhaps the best-known episode in the book, Bunyan characteristically turns one of the most familiar institutions in contemporary England—annual fairs—into an allegory of universal spiritual significance. Christian and his companion Faithful pass through the town of Vanity at the season of the local fair. *Vanity* means “emptiness” or “worthlessness,” and hence the fair is an allegory of worldliness and the corruption of the religious life through the attractions of the world. From earliest times numerous fairs were held for stated periods throughout Britain; to them the most important merchants from all over Europe brought their wares. The serious business of buying and selling was accompanied by all sorts of diversions—eating, drinking, and other fleshly pleasures, as well as spectacles of strange animals, acrobats, and other wonders.

[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: The “unclean spirit” sent by Jesus into the Gadarene swine (Mark 5:9). Beelzebub, prince of the devils (Matthew 12:24). Apollyon, the destroyer, “the Angel of the bottomless pit” (Revelation 9:11).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Appointments and promotions to political or ecclesiastical positions.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The practices and the temporal power of the Roman Catholic Church.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cheerful, lustful.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ask the price of.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Foreign. “Bedlams”: lunatics from Bethlehem Hospital, the insane asylum in London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Greeks and Romans so designated all those who spoke a foreign tongue. “Canaan”: the Promised Land, ultimately conquered by the Children of Israel (Joshua 4) and settled by them; hence the pilgrims speak the language of the Bible and of the true religion. Dissenters were notorious for their habitual use of biblical language.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Interrogated and tried them. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hinder. [Return to reference 6](#)

## [THE RIVER OF DEATH AND THE CELESTIAL CITY]

So I saw that when they<sup>7</sup> awoke, they addressed themselves to go up to the City; but, as I said, the reflection of the sun upon the City (for the City was pure gold, Revelation xxi.18) was so extremely glorious, that they could not, as yet, with open face behold it, but through an instrument made for that purpose. (II Corinthians iii.18). So I saw that as I went on, there met them two men, in raiment that shone like gold; also their faces shone as the light.

These men asked the pilgrims whence they came; and they told them. They also asked them where they had lodged, what difficulties and dangers, what comforts and pleasures they had met in the way; and they told them. Then said the men that met them, You have but two difficulties more to meet with, and then you are in the City.

Christian then and his companion asked the men to go along with them; so they told them they would. But, said they, you must obtain it by your own faith. So I saw in my dream that they went on together till they came in sight of the gate.

Now I further saw that betwixt them and the gate was a river, but there was no bridge to go over; the river was very deep. At the sight, therefore, of this river, the pilgrims were much stunned;<sup>8</sup> but the men that went with them said, You must go through, or you cannot come at the gate.

The pilgrims then began to inquire if there was no other way to the gate; to which they answered, Yes; but there hath not any, save two, to wit, Enoch and Elijah,<sup>9</sup> been permitted to tread that path, since the foundation of the world, nor shall, until the last trumpet shall sound. (I Corinthians xv.51, 52). The pilgrims then, especially Christian, began to despond in his mind, and looked this way and that, but no way could be found by them by which they might escape the river. Then they asked the men if the waters were all of a depth. They said no; yet they could not help them in that case; for, said they, you shall find it deeper or shallower, as you believe in the King of the place.



They then addressed themselves to the water; and entering, Christian began to sink, and crying out to his good friend Hopeful, he said, I sink in deep waters; the billows go over my head, all his waves go over me! Selah.<sup>1</sup>

Then said the other, Be of good cheer, my brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good. Then said Christian, Ah, my friend, the sorrows of death have compassed me about; I shall not see the land that flows with milk and honey. And with that a great darkness and horror fell upon Christian, so that he could not see before him. Also here he in great measure lost his senses, so that he could neither remember nor orderly talk of any of those sweet refreshments that he had met with in the way of his pilgrimage. But all the words that he spake still tended to discover<sup>2</sup> that he had horror of mind, and heart-fears that he should die in that river, and never obtain entrance in at the gate. Here also, as they that stood by perceived, he was much in the troublesome thoughts of the sins that he had committed, both since and before he began to be a pilgrim. 'Twas also observed that he was troubled with apparitions of hobgoblins and evil spirits; for ever and anon he would intimate so much by words. Hopeful, therefore, here had much ado to keep his brother's head above water; yea, sometimes he would be quite gone down, and then, ere a while, he would rise up again half dead. Hopeful also would endeavor to comfort him, saying, Brother, I see the gate and men standing by to receive us; but Christian would answer, 'Tis you, 'tis you they wait for; you have been Hopeful ever since I knew you. And so have you, said he to Christian. Ah, brother, said he, surely if I was right he would now arise to help me; but for my sins he hath brought me into the snare, and hath left me. Then said Hopeful, My brother, you have quite forgot the text, where it is said of the wicked, "There are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men" (Psalms lxxiii.4, 5). These troubles and distresses that you go through in these waters are no sign that God hath forsaken you, but are sent to try you, whether you will call to mind

that which heretofore you have received of his goodness, and live upon him in your distresses.

Then I saw in my dream that Christian was as in a muse<sup>3</sup> a while, to whom also Hopeful added this word, Be of good cheer. Jesus Christ maketh thee whole. And with that Christian brake out with a loud voice, Oh, I see him again! and he tells me, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" (Isaiah xliii.2). Then they both took courage, and the Enemy was after that as still as a stone, until they were gone over. Christian therefore presently found ground to stand upon, and so it followed that the rest of the river was but shallow. Thus they got over. Now, upon the bank of the river on the other side, they saw the two Shining Men again, who there waited<sup>4</sup> for them. Wherefore, being come out of the river, they saluted<sup>4</sup> them saying, We are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those that shall be heirs of salvation. Thus they went along towards the gate. \* \* \*

Now when they were come up to the gate, there was written over it in letters of gold, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation xxii.14).

Then I saw in my dream, that the Shining Men bid them call at the gate; the which, when they did, some from above looked over the gate, to wit, Enoch, Moses, and Elijah, etc., to whom it was said, These pilgrims are come from the City of Destruction, for the love that they bear to the King of this place; and then the pilgrims gave in unto them each man his certificate, which they had received in the beginning; those, therefore, were carried in to the King, who, when he had read them, said, Where are the men? To whom it was answered, They are standing without the gate. The King then commanded to open the gate, "That the righteous nation," said he, "which keepeth the truth, may enter in" (Isaiah xxvi.2).

Now I saw in my dream that these two men went in at the gate; and lo, as they entered, they were transfigured, and they had raiment put on that shone like gold. There was also that met them

with harps and crowns, and gave them to them: the harps to praise withal, and the crowns in token of honor. Then I heard in my dream that all the bells in the city rang again for joy, and that it was said unto them, "ENTER YE INTO THE JOY OF OUR LORD" (Matthew xxv.21). I also heard the men themselves, that they sang with a loud voice, saying, "BLESSING AND HONOR, GLORY AND POWER, BE TO HIM THAT SITTETH UPON THE THRONE, AND TO THE LAMB FOREVER AND EVER" (Revelation v.13).

Now just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them, and, behold, the City shone like the sun; the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many men, with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal.

There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord" (Revelation iv.8). And after that they shut up the gates, which when I had seen I wished myself among them.

Now while I was gazing upon all these things, I turned my head to look back, and saw Ignorance come up to the riverside; but he soon got over, and that without half that difficulty which the other two men met with. For it happened that there was then in that place one Vain-hope, a ferryman, that with his boat helped him over; so he, as the other, I saw, did ascend the hill to come up to the gate, only he came alone; neither did any man meet him with the least encouragement. When he was come up to the gate, he looked up to the writing that was above, and then began to knock, supposing that entrance should have been quickly administered to him; but he was asked by the men that looked over the top of the gate, Whence came you? and what would you have? He answered, I have eat and drank in the presence of the King, and he has taught in our streets. Then they asked him for his certificate, that they might go in and show it to the King; so he fumbled in his bosom for one, and found none. Then said they, Have you none? But the man answered never a word. So they told the King, but he would not come down to see him, but commanded the two Shining Ones that conducted Christian and Hopeful to the City, to go out and take Ignorance, and bind him

hand and foot, and have him away. Then they took him up, and carried him through the air, to the door that I saw in the side of the hill, and put him in there. Then I saw that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction. So I awoke, and behold it was a dream.

## Endnotes

1678

- Note 7: Christian and his companion, Hopeful. Ignorance, who appears tragically in the final paragraph, had tried to accompany the two pilgrims but had dropped behind because of his hobbling gait.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Amazed.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Both were “translated” alive to heaven (Genesis 5:24, Hebrews 11:5, 2 Kings 2:11–12).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A word of uncertain meaning that occurs frequently at the end of a verse in the Psalms. Bunyan may have supposed it to signify the end.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Reveal.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A deep meditation.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Greeted.[Return to reference 4](#)

# Science, Society, and God

In the early seventeenth century, politician and philosopher Francis Bacon imagined a utopian world organized around a powerful scientific society that aimed at “the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible.” Over three decades later, on November 28, 1660, a group gathered at Gresham College to discuss creating a real scientific society—not in a fictional text but right where they were, in London. While Bacon had imagined a secretive society, these men wanted to create one that would publicly encourage a kind of learning that did not yet feature in the school or university curriculum. Among the men gathered was Robert Boyle, a gentleman doing groundbreaking experiments into the nature of matter with a vacuum pump. John Wilkins was there too, an influential clergyman who was devising a sign system for a new scientific language. The group also included, among others, Lawrence Rooke, an astronomer; William Petty, a medical doctor; Lord Viscount William Brouncker, a nobleman interested in math and music; and Christopher Wren, who would become famous as the architect of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. The society these men dreamed up later received a charter from King Charles II, who approved of their work, and became the Royal Society of London for Improving of Natural Knowledge—the first scientific society in England. This group would soon start publishing the *Philosophical Transactions*, the first scientific journal in English.

The seventeenth century used to be described as the century of the “Scientific Revolution,” a period of heroic individual acts of discovery: Isaac Newton supposedly was struck by an apple that prompted a “Eureka!” insight into the very structure of the universe. Today, scholars have challenged many aspects of this old picture. The myth of a solitary genius has been replaced by a clearer picture of a group of people working both within and outside new

institutions to forge new practices, build new technologies, and legitimize new kinds of knowledge. And what once seemed like a “revolution” instead involved complex continuities with the past. Even “science” as a singular noun does not seem exactly right. Contemporaries sometimes described what they were doing as the “new science” (where “science” was from the Latin *scientia*, signifying knowledge more generally), but they also talked of “natural philosophy,” “mechanical philosophy,” and “natural history.” The word *scientist* was not coined until the nineteenth century: they were instead “natural philosophers,” or “naturalists,” or “virtuosi” (a word also used for collectors). Using our word *science* also threatens to obscure the way seventeenth-century new science was understood in relation with religion, or alchemy and natural magic, or anthropology, or linguistics. Yet, even if the old picture of the “Scientific Revolution” has been challenged, this period remains crucial in the history of science: new ideas about atomism, experiment, technology, and probability developed, and many of the practices and structures we associate with modern science were institutionalized. The new science became more popular, capturing imaginations. This cluster focuses on the early Royal Society as it offers a snapshot of the late seventeenth-century moment when all this was starting to happen.

The Royal Society’s early advocates made much of how its members held different political and religious views and came from different walks of life (nobility and tradesmen alike). In the early years, however, the fellows were all men and most of them were quite privileged. Women were not allowed in the seventeenth century or for a long time after. (The first women were elected to the Royal Society in 1945.) The first Jewish man, Moses da Costa, was elected in 1736; and in the first decades of the eighteenth century the Society rejected a Black Jamaican man, Francis Williams, who attended a few meetings and was proposed for membership. (Later, the *Gentleman’s Magazine* suggested that the rejection was “solely . . . on account of his complexion.”) The men of the Royal Society were not the only people interested in science in the period, just one group that organized themselves influentially.





Frontispiece to Thomas Sprat's ***History of the Royal Society***, Wenceslaus Hollar, engraving, London, 1667. A bust of King Charles II, called the "author and patron of the Royal Society" (Latin), is being crowned by Fame. To the left is the Royal Society's president, William Brouncker; to the right, Francis Bacon, pointing to mathematical and military technology. On the left side are shelves full of books, and in the background, more

scientific instruments, including Robert Boyle's air pump (center left).

---

The early fellows chose as their motto "Nullius in verba," meaning "On the word of no one." Instead of writing arguments relying on the authority of Aristotle and other ancient thinkers, they wanted to see things for themselves: actual natural things, animals and plants. They were empiricists, thinkers who started from sensory experience. These empiricists would begin small—studying natural objects and collecting facts from all over—and only slowly build to conclusions or generalizations. But they would not just passively look at nature: they would experiment and dissect. This approach to knowledge seemed to involve a change of scale that was striking to contemporaries. Some people found it mockable: instead of asking big questions about Truth, these philosophers proposed studying dirt and bugs. But they also used powerful instruments to enable a change of scale that seemed thrilling to others: with microscopes they could see tiny animals moving around in cheese, and telescopes helped them glimpse stars never before seen by humans. One influential idea at the core of the Society's early work was that nature was like a machine—it worked, clocklike, through tiny bits of matter in motion, with none of the complicated ideas about "occult powers" or "substantial forms" that Aristotelian traditions used to explain matter.

None of these ideas, however, went unchallenged. An empiricist approach to knowledge was dominant in the late seventeenth-century Royal Society, but it was not shared by the fellows doing cutting-edge work in math. And even proponents of the "mechanical" worldview were unsure if it could explain gravity or the human nervous system, say. Further, there were philosophers outside the society—like Thomas Hobbes and Margaret Cavendish—who were well versed in the new science but actively challenged the Royal Society's dominant ways of knowing (could seventeenth-century microscopes be trusted to do what advocates promised?) and its understanding of nature (was all matter really as inert and passive as



bits of a clock?). In the culture at large, the Royal Society's new science was far from dominant: universities kept on teaching their Aristotle-inspired brand of Scholasticism. And theater audiences of Thomas Shadwell's play *The Virtuoso* (1676) laughed at an impotent madman wasting time and money on bottles of air but also slaughtering dogs for useless experiments that led nowhere (see Joseph Addison's reimagining of this character, [p. 130](#)). Today, familiar with how powerful science has become, we might find it surprising that its early advocates had to work so hard to promote and legitimize science. The fellows of the Royal Society were at pains to emphasize that, unlike theological and political disputes that had been central to the Civil Wars of the preceding years, the study of nature posed no social threat. They also insisted that their work would be useful to society at large, yielding practical applications. And this new science did not challenge Christianity, they argued, but served it: they could help people understand God's wisdom and design in the creation of the world. Over the course of the eighteenth century, science was popularized in new ways—including in sermons, introductory books for women, and coffeehouse lectures featuring live experiments. Over the same period, science would also get aligned with power in increasingly material ways: for instance, the Royal Society would help fund Captain James Cook's imperial voyages into the Pacific in the 1760s.

Literature of this period expressed a wide range of attitudes about science: writers mocked it or thrilled to its possibilities; they cited its discoveries, or their prose styles registered its influence. And while science influenced literature, the reverse was also true. Francis Bacon inspired the Society with utopian fiction, and Cavendish critiqued it in fiction too. To be sure, some advocates of science distrusted literature's resources: "nullius in verba" condemned textual authorities but also rhetoric itself. Advocates of early science dreamed influentially of a "plain style" of writing that would avoid what John Locke called the "cheat" of figurative language and deliver, as Thomas Sprat put it, "so many *things* almost in an equal number of *words*" (see [p. 98](#)). Whatever they said, though, science's advocates kept right on using kinds of language we think of as

literary—"nullius in verba" itself is taken from Horace's ancient Latin poetry. Moreover, Steven Shapin argues that Robert Boyle worked with vacuum technology but also a "literary technology" that helped legitimize his findings, a vivid and verbose kind of description that urged readers to imagine they were actually watching the experiment. And so many early Royal Society writers used analogies and metaphors to explain and understand what they saw—even the very notion of a "mechanical philosophy" rests on the metaphor of nature as a machine. Indeed, for all that "nullius in verba" was its ideal, early science happened in and through language, and it comes down to us in these words.

## THOMAS SPRAT

Thomas Sprat (1635–1713) wrote *The History of the Royal Society of London, For the Improving of Natural Knowledge* in 1667, just seven years after the first meeting and five years after the Society received its charter. Sprat's book offers a history of the Society's founding but also of science itself, as Sprat places its brand of experimentation in a long history of knowledge stretching back to the ancient Greeks. The book also functions as a kind of introduction to the Society's work, featuring excerpts from its science: "observations of the eclipses of the satellites of Jupiter," a description of Tenerife, "an account of a dog dissected," experiments with colored dye, and a discussion of the life cycle of Colchester oysters. Above all, though, the *History* is a defense of the Royal Society against its critics, influentially expressing some key themes of early science's advocates: science is useful, and no danger to church or state.

The *History* is perhaps best remembered today for its famous comments on scientific writing—Sprat's celebration of the Royal Society's "plain" style that matched things to words, and his diatribe against ornamental and affective rhetoric. There is historical irony in the influence of his antirhetorical ideal, for Sprat himself was better known in the seventeenth century as a poet interested in ornate Pindaric odes. Moreover, Sprat brought considerable rhetorical savvy to his endorsement of the Royal Society and its aims. He closes by imagining science ushering in a better world: "all tempests will cease; the oppositions and contentious wranglings of science falsely so called will soon vanish away; the peaceable calmness of men's judgements will have admirable influence on their manners; the sincerity of their understandings will appear in their actions; their opinions will be less violent and dogmatical but more certain" and "the value of their arts will be esteemed by the great things they perform and not by those they speak." The new science will, Sprat promises, "enrich us with all the benefits of fruitfulness and plenty."

# ***From The History of the Royal Society***

## **[A MODEL OF THEIR WHOLE DESIGN]**

Their purpose is, in short, to make faithful records of all the works of nature or art, which can come within their reach: that so the present age and posterity may be able to put a mark on the errors, which have been strengthened by long prescription:<sup>1</sup> to restore the truths that have lain neglected: to push on those, which are already known, to more various uses:<sup>2</sup> and to make the way more passable to what remains unrevealed. This is the compass of their design. And to accomplish this, they have endeavored to separate the knowledge of nature from the colors of rhetoric, the devices of fancy, or the delightful deceit of fables. They have labored to enlarge it, from being confined to the custody of a few,<sup>3</sup> or from servitude to private interests. They have striven to preserve it from being over-pressed by a confused heap of vain and useless particulars; or from being straitened and bounded too much up by general doctrines. They have tried to put it into a condition of perpetual increasing, by settling an inviolable correspondence between the hand and the brain. They have studied to make it not only an enterprise of one season or of some lucky opportunity; but a business of time, a steady, a lasting, a popular, an uninterrupted work. They have attempted to free it from the artifice, and humors,<sup>4</sup> and passions of sects; to render it an instrument, whereby mankind may obtain a dominion over things, and not only over one another's judgments. And lastly, they have begun to establish these reformatations in philosophy, not so much by any solemnity of laws or ostentation of ceremonies, as by solid practice and examples: not by a glorious pomp of words, but by the silent, effectual, and unanswerable arguments of real productions.

## **[THEIR MANNER OF DISCOURSE]**

Thus they have directed, judged, conjectured upon, and improved experiments. But lastly, in these and all other businesses that have come under their care, there is one thing more about which the Society has been most solicitous; and that is, the manner of their discourse: which, unless they had been very watchful to keep in due temper, the whole spirit and vigor of their design had been soon eaten out by the luxury and redundance of speech. The ill effects of this superfluity of talking have already overwhelmed most other arts and professions; insomuch that when I consider the means of happy living and the causes of their corruption, I can hardly forbear recanting<sup>5</sup> what I said before; and concluding that eloquence ought to be banished out of all civil societies, as a thing fatal to peace and good manners. To this opinion I should wholly incline, if I did not find that it is a weapon, which may be as easily procured by bad men as good, and that, if these<sup>6</sup> should only cast it away and those retain it, the naked innocence of virtue would be upon all occasions exposed to the armed malice of the wicked. This is the chief reason that should now keep up the ornaments of speaking in any request: since they are so much degenerated from their original usefulness. They were at first, no doubt, an admirable instrument in the hands of wise men: when they were only employed to describe goodness, honesty, obedience in larger, fairer, and more moving images; to represent truth, clothed with bodies; and to bring knowledge back again to our very senses, from whence it was at first derived to our understandings.<sup>7</sup> But now they are generally changed to worse uses. They make the fancy disgust the best things, if they come sound and unadorned; they are in open defiance against reason, professing not to hold much correspondence with that but with its slaves, the passions; they give the mind a motion too changeable and bewitching to consist with right practice. Who can behold, without indignation, how many mists and uncertainties these specious tropes and figures have brought on our knowledge? How many rewards, which are due to more profitable and difficult arts, have been still snatched away by the easy vanity of fine speaking? For now I am warmed with this just anger, I cannot withhold myself from betraying

the shallowness of all these seeming mysteries, upon which we writers and speakers look so big. And, in few words, I dare say that of all the studies of men, nothing may be sooner obtained than this vicious abundance of phrase, this trick of metaphors, this volubility of tongue, which makes so great a noise in the world. But I spend words in vain; for the evil is now so inveterate<sup>8</sup> that it is hard to know whom to blame or where to begin to reform. We all value one another so much upon this beautiful deceit and labor so long after it in the years of our education, that we cannot but ever after think kinder of it than it deserves. And indeed, in most other parts of learning, I look on it to be a thing almost utterly desperate in its cure: and I think it may be placed amongst those general mischiefs, such as the dissention of Christian princes, the want of practice in religion and the like, which have been so long spoken against that men are become insensible<sup>9</sup> about them, every one shifting off the fault from himself to others; and so they are only made bare commonplaces of complaint. It will suffice my present purpose to point out what has been done by the Royal Society towards the correcting of its excesses in natural philosophy, to which it is, of all others, a most professed enemy.

They have therefore been most rigorous in putting in execution the only remedy that can be found for this extravagance, and that has been a constant resolution to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men delivered so many *things* almost in an equal number of *words*. They have exacted from all their members a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness; bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can; and preferring the language of artisans, countrymen, and merchants, before that of wits or scholars.

### **[NATURAL PHILOSOPHY NOT HARMFUL TO RELIGION]**

First there can be no just reason assigned, why an experimenter should be prone to deny the essence and properties of God, the

universal sovereignty of His dominion, and His providence over the creation. He has before him the very same argument to confirm his judgment in all these; with which he himself is wont to be abundantly satisfied when he meets with it in any of his philosophical inquiries. In everything that he tries, he believes that this is enough for him to rest on, if he finds that not only his own, but the universal observations of men of all times and places, without any mutual conspiracy have consented in the same conclusion. How can he then refrain from embracing this common truth, which is witnessed by the unanimous approbation of all countries, the agreement of nations, and the secret acknowledgement of every man's breast?<sup>1</sup>

'Tis true his employment is about material things. But this is so far from drawing him to oppose invisible beings that it rather puts his thoughts into an excellent good capacity to believe them. In every work of nature that he handles, he knows that there is not only a gross<sup>2</sup> substance, which presents itself to all men's eyes, but an infinite subtilty of parts, which come not into the sharpest sense. So that what the Scripture relates of the purity of God, of the spirituality of his nature, and that of angels and the souls of men cannot seem incredible to him, when he perceives the numberless particles that move in every man's blood and the prodigious streams that continually flow unseen from every body. Having found that his own senses have been so far assisted by the instruments of art, he may sooner admit that his mind ought to be raised higher by a heavenly light in those things wherein his senses do fall short. If (as the Apostle says) the invisible things of God are manifested by the visible,<sup>3</sup> then how much stronger arguments has he for his belief in the eternal power and Godhead, from the vast number of creatures that are invisible to others but are exposed to his view by the help of his experiments?

Thus he is prepared to admit a deity and to embrace the consequences of that concession. He is also from his experiments as well furnished with arguments to adore it: he has always before his eyes the beauty, contrivance, and order of God's works: from hence,

he will learn to serve Him with all reverence, who in all that He has made consulted ornament, as well as use \* \* \*<sup>4</sup>

So true is that saying of my Lord Bacon, *That by a little knowledge of nature men become atheists; but a great deal returns them back again to a sound and religious mind.*<sup>5</sup> In brief, if we rightly apprehend the matter, it will be found that it is not only sottishness<sup>6</sup> but prophaneness for men to cry out against the understanding of nature: for that being nothing else but the instrument of God, whereby He gives being and action to things, the knowledge of it deserves so little to be esteemed impious, that it ought rather to be reckoned as divine.

## Endnotes

1667

- Note 1: Custom, practice.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A recurrent theme for the Royal Society: they would turn knowledge to use, including practical applications.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Royal Society often emphasized how it opened up knowledge to more people, though in practice it was still composed exclusively of men, mostly quite privileged.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Whims or dispositions.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Taking back. Earlier, he had discussed style and proposed an English Academy for “polishing” the English language.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Good men.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A fundamental empiricist tenet: knowledge comes from sensory experience of things, not from words.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Entrenched.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Indifferent. “Dissent”: disagreement between. “Want”: lack.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sprat overstates the universality of monotheism. His emphasis on the “unanimous approbation” also sits oddly with



the Royal Society's emphasis on experiment over tradition.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Large enough for anyone to see.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: From Romans 1:20: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sprat then addresses the objection that science would lead experimenters to atheism.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sprat misquotes Francis Bacon's essay "Of Atheism" (1612): "a little philosophy inclineth a man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men about to religion." Sprat later further develops this into an argument that the Royal Society poses no political threat: "that is true in civil affairs, which I have already quoted out of my Lord Bacon concerning divine: a little knowledge is subject to make men headstrong, insolent, and untractable; but a great deal has a quite contrary effect, inclining them to be submissive to their betters, and obedient to the sovereign power."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Stupidity.[Return to reference 6](#)

# ROBERT HOOKE

Robert Hooke (1635–1703) was one of the most prolific and skilled natural philosophers of the early Royal Society. He was born to a minister and received a small inheritance, though he was of a lower class than many of the other gentlemen of the Royal Society. In the early 1650s, he started working as an assistant to natural philosophers in Oxford, a role that involved him in cutting-edge scientific work, including Robert Boyle's groundbreaking vacuum pump experiments. Upon the Royal Society's founding, Hooke was appointed curator of experiments, tasked with performing a few at every meeting. This was something more like a job at first (though a salary was promised only in the future), but Hooke was given full status as a fellow the following year. Later, he was granted a paid lectureship at Gresham College, the institution in London where the Royal Society met. Many scholars thus describe Hooke as "the first professional research scientist," earning his living off scientific work. Later, Hooke became one of the secretaries of the Royal Society.

Hooke's most influential work, the lavishly illustrated *Micrographia*—literally, "tiny writing" or "drawing"—was published in 1665, only the second book to come out with the Royal Society's imprimatur, or official sanction. The very project of microscopy captured many of the central energies of early science: it involved a Francis Bacon-inspired collection of facts about nature; it worked through minute attention to sensed particulars; and it used a scientific instrument that promised to remedy, at least partially, fundamental human limitations. The *Micrographia* also shows evidence of Hooke's own extraordinarily wide-ranging scientific interests, as in its pages he studies color, fire, minerals, plants, and insects and even speculates about craters on the moon. The book contains the first use of the word *cell* to describe plant structure, in Hooke's discussion of cork under a microscope.

One of Hooke's recurring conclusions was about how the microscope reveals the complex artistry of God's creation, in comparison with the "rudeness and bungling" of human constructions: magnified, a seed evinced previously unfathomable intricacy of design, whereas a manufactured needle showed only lumps and bumps. Yet, the *Micrographia* was also a celebration of the new possibilities of scientific technology, of the idea that human abilities might be extended.

# ***From Micrographia: or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses<sup>1</sup> with Observations and Inquiries Thereupon***

## ***From The Preface***

It is the great prerogative of mankind above other creatures, that we are not only able to behold the works of nature, or barely to sustain our lives by them, but we have also the power of considering, comparing, altering, assisting, and improving them to various uses. And as this is the peculiar privilege of human nature in general, so is it capable of being so far advanced by the helps of art and experience as to make some men excel others in their observations and deductions, almost as much as they do beasts. By the addition of such artificial instruments and methods, there may be, in some manner, a reparation made for the mischiefs, and imperfection, mankind has drawn upon itself, by negligence and intemperance and a willful and superstitious deserting the prescripts and rules of nature, whereby every man, both from a derived corruption, innate and born with him, and from his breeding and converse with men, is very subject to slip into all sorts of errors.<sup>2</sup>

The only way which now remains for us to recover some degree of those former perfections seems to be by rectifying the operations of the sense, the memory, and reason, since upon the evidence, the strength, the integrity, and the right correspondence of all these, all the light by which our actions are to be guided is to be renewed, and all our command over things is to be established.

It is therefore most worthy of our consideration to recollect their several defects,<sup>3</sup> that so we may the better understand how to

supply them, and by what assistances we may enlarge their power and secure them in performing their particular duties.

As for the actions of our senses, we cannot but observe them to be in many particulars much outdone by those of other creatures, and when at best to be far short of the perfection they seem capable of. And these infirmities of the senses arise from a double cause, either from the disproportion of the object to the organ, whereby an infinite number of things can never enter into them,<sup>4</sup> or else from error in the perception, that many things, which come within their reach, are not received in a right manner.

The like frailties are to be found in the memory; we often let many things slip away from us, which deserve to be retained; and of those which we treasure up, a great part is either frivolous or false; and if good and substantial, either in tract of time obliterated, or at best so overwhelmed and buried under more frothy notions that when there is need of them, they are in vain sought for.

The two main foundations being so deceivable, it is no wonder that all the succeeding works which we build upon them, of arguing, concluding, defining, judging, and all the other degrees of reason are liable to the same imperfection, being, at best, either vain<sup>5</sup> or uncertain: so that the errors of the understanding are answerable to the two other, being defective both in the quantity and goodness of its knowledge; for the limits to which our thoughts are confined are small in respect of the vast extent of nature itself; some parts of it are too large to be comprehended, and some too little to be perceived. And from thence it must follow, that not having a full sensation of the object, we must be very lame and imperfect in our conceptions about it, and in all the proportions which we build upon it; hence we often take the shadow of things for the substance, small appearances for good similitudes,<sup>6</sup> similitudes for definitions; and even many of those, which we think to be the most solid definitions, are rather expressions of our own misguided apprehensions than of the true nature of the things themselves.

The effects of these imperfections are manifested in different ways, according to the temper and disposition of the several minds

of men: some they incline to gross ignorance and stupidity, and others to a presumptuous imposing on other men's opinions, and a confident dogmatizing on matters, whereof there is no assurance to be given.

Thus all the uncertainty and mistakes of human actions proceed either from the narrowness and wandering of our senses, from the slipperiness or delusion of our memory, from the confinement<sup>7</sup> or rashness of our understanding, so that 'tis no wonder that our power over natural causes and effects is so slowly improved, seeing we are not only to contend with the obscurity and difficulty of the things whereon we work and think, but even the forces of our own minds conspire to betray us.

These being the dangers in the process of human reason, the remedies of them all can only proceed from the real, the mechanical, the experimental philosophy, which has this advantage over the philosophy of discourse and disputation, that whereas that chiefly aims at the subtilty of its deductions and conclusions, without much regard to the first groundwork, which ought to be well laid on the sense and memory; so this<sup>8</sup> intends the right ordering of them all, and the making them serviceable to each other.

The first thing to be undertaken in this weighty work is a watchfulness over the failings and an enlargement of the dominion of the senses.

To which end it is requisite, first, that there should be a scrupulous choice and a strict examination of the reality, constancy, and certainty of the particulars that we admit; this is the first rise whereon truth is to begin, and here the most severe and most impartial diligence must be employed; the storing up of all, without any regard to evidence or use, will only tend to darkness and confusion. We must not therefore esteem the riches of our philosophical treasure by the number only, but chiefly by the weight; the most vulgar instances are not to be neglected, but above all, the most instructive are to be entertained; the footsteps of Nature are to be traced, not only in her ordinary course, but when she seems to be

put to her shifts, to make many doublings and turnings, and to use some kind of art in endeavoring to avoid our discovery.<sup>9</sup>

The next care to be taken, in respect of the senses, is a supplying of their infirmities with instruments, and, as it were, the adding of artificial organs to the natural; this in one of them has been of late years accomplished with prodigious benefit to all sorts of useful knowledge, by the invention of optical glasses. By the means of telescopes, there is nothing so far distant but may be represented to our view; and by the help of microscopes, there is nothing so small as to escape our inquiry; hence there is a new visible world discovered<sup>1</sup> to the understanding. By this means the heavens are opened, and a vast number of new stars, and new motions, and new productions appear in them, to which all the ancient astronomers were utterly strangers. By this the Earth itself, which lies so near us, under our feet, shows quite a new thing to us, and in every little particle of its matter, we now behold almost as great a variety of creatures, as we were able before to reckon up in the whole universe itself.

It seems not improbable, but that by these helps the subtilty of the composition of bodies, the structure of their parts, the various texture of their matter, the instruments and manner of their inward motions,<sup>2</sup> and all the other possible appearances of things may come to be more fully discovered; all which the ancient Peripatetics<sup>3</sup> were content to comprehend in two general and (unless further explained) useless words of *matter* and *form*. From whence there may arise many admirable advantages towards the increase of the operative<sup>4</sup> and the mechanic knowledge, to which this age seems so much inclined, because we may perhaps be enabled to discern all the secret workings of nature, almost in the same manner as we do those that are the productions of art, and are managed by wheels, and engines, and springs, that were devised by human wit.<sup>5</sup>

In this kind I here present to the world my imperfect endeavors; which though they shall prove no other way considerable, yet, I hope, they may be in some measure useful to the main design of a reformation in philosophy, if it be only by showing that there is not

so much required towards it, any strength of imagination, or exactness of method, or depth of contemplation (though the addition of these, where they can be had, must needs produce a much more perfect composure) as a sincere hand and a faithful eye, to examine and to record the things themselves as they appear. \* \* \*<sup>6</sup>

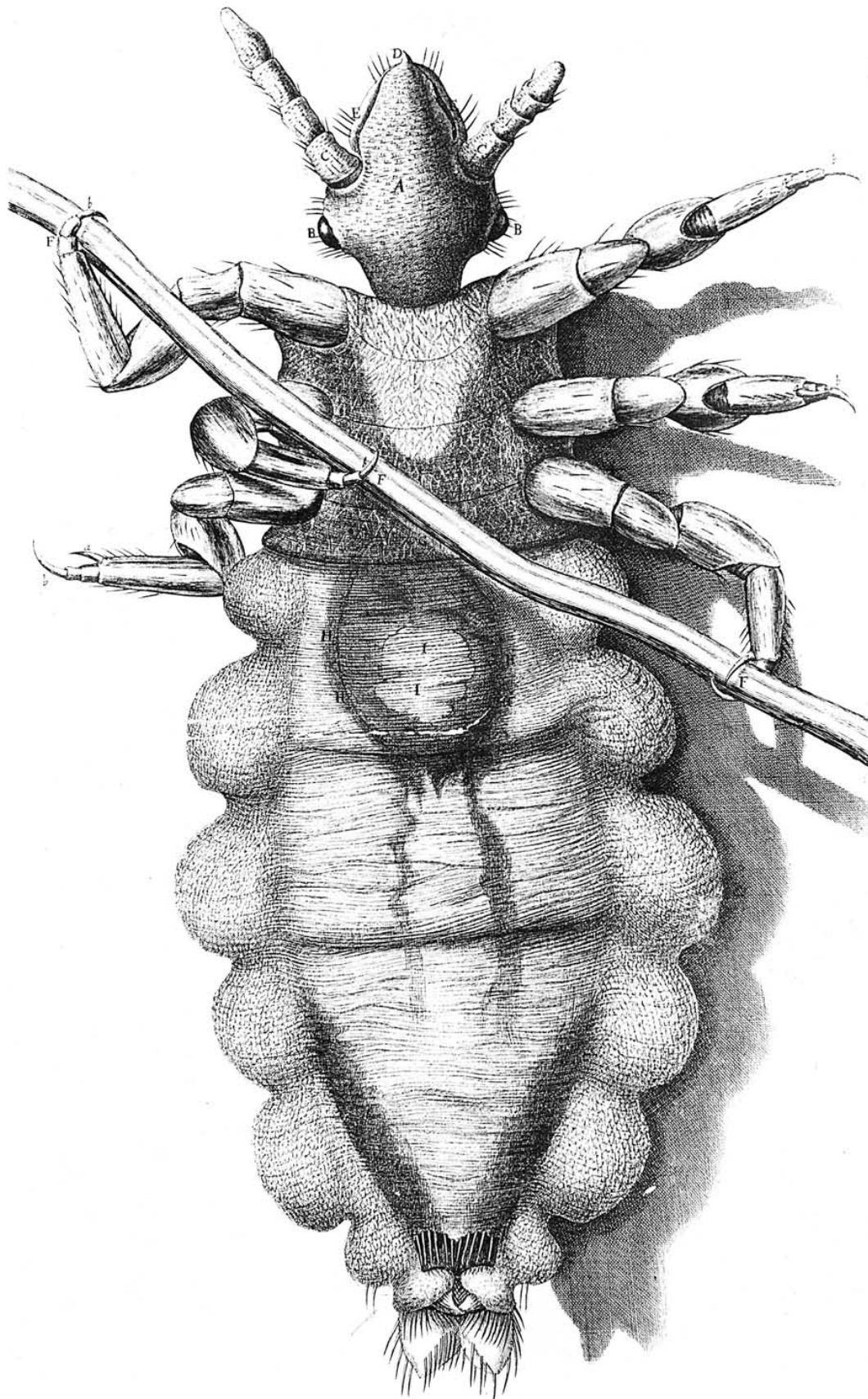
### ***Observation 54. Of a Louse***

This is a creature so officious, that 'twill be known to every one at one time or other, so busy and so impudent<sup>7</sup> that it will be intruding itself in everyone's company, and so proud and aspiring withall, that it fears not to trample on the best, and affects nothing so much as a crown;<sup>8</sup> feeds and lives very high, and that makes it so saucy, as to pull any one by the ears<sup>9</sup> that comes in its way, and will never be quiet till it has drawn blood: it is troubled at nothing so much as at a man that scratches his head, as knowing that man is plotting and contriving some mischief against it, and that makes it oftentime skulk into some meaner and lower place, and run behind a man's back, though it go very much against the hair;<sup>1</sup> which ill conditions of it having made it better known than trusted would exempt me from making any further description of it did not my faithful Mercury,<sup>2</sup> my microscope, bring me other information of it. For this has discovered to me, by means of a very bright light cast on it, that it is a creature of a very odd shape; it has a head shaped like that expressed in 35. *Scheme*<sup>3</sup> marked with A, which seems almost conical, but is a little flatted on the upper and under sides, at the biggest part of which, on either side behind the head (as it were, being the place where other creatures' ears stand) are placed its two black shining goggle eyes BB, looking backwards, and fenced round with several small cilia or hairs that encompass it, so that it seems this creature has no very good foresight:<sup>4</sup> it does not seem to have any eyelids, and therefore perhaps its eyes were so placed that it might the better cleanse them with its fore-legs; and perhaps this may be the reason why they so much avoid and run from the light behind them, for being made to live in the shady and dark recesses of the hair, and thence probably their eye having a great aperture, the open and



clear light, especially that of the sun, must needs very much offend them;<sup>5</sup> to secure these eyes from receiving any injury from the hairs through which it passes, it has two horns that grow before it, in the place where one would have thought the eyes should be; each of these CC hath four joints, which are fringed, as it were, with small bristles, from which to the tip of its snout D, the head seems very round and tapering, ending in a very sharp nose D, which seems to have a small hole and to be the passage through which he sucks the blood. Now whereas if it be placed on its back with its belly upwards, as it is in the 35. *Scheme*, it seems in several positions to have a resemblance of chaps, or jaws, as is represented in the figure by EE, yet in other postures those dark strokes disappear; and having kept several of them in a box for two or three days, so that for all that time they had nothing to feed on, I found, upon letting one creep on my hand, that it immediately fell to sucking,<sup>6</sup> and did neither seem to thrust its nose very deep into the skin, nor to open any kind of mouth, but I could plainly perceive a small current of blood, which came directly from its snout and past into its belly; and about A there seemed a contrivance, somewhat resembling a pump, pair of bellows, or heart, for by a very swift systole and diastole<sup>7</sup> the blood seemed drawn from the nose and forced into the body. It did not seem at all, though I viewed it a good while as it was sucking, to thrust more of its nose into the skin than the very snout D, nor did it cause the least discernable pain, and yet the blood seemed to run through its head very quick and freely, so that it seems there is no part of the skin but the blood is dispersed into, nay, even into the *cuticula*; for had it thrust its whole nose in from D to CC, it would not have amounted to the supposed thickness of that tegument,<sup>8</sup> the length of the nose being not more than a three hundredth part of an inch. It has six legs, covered with a very transparent shell, and jointed exactly like a crab's or lobster's; each leg is divided into six parts by these joints, and those have here and there several small hairs; and at the end of each leg it has two claws, very properly adapted for its peculiar use, being thereby enabled to walk very securely both on the skin and hair; and indeed this contrivance of

the feet is very curious, and could not be made more commodiously and compendiously,<sup>9</sup> for performing both these requisite motions of walking and climbing up the hair of a man's head than it is: for, by having the lesser claw (a) set so much short of the bigger (b) when it walks on the skin the shorter touches not, and then the feet are the same with those of a mite and several other small insects, but by means of the small joints of the longer claw it can bend it round, and so with both claws take hold of a hair, in the manner represented in the figure, the long transparent cylinder FFF being a man's hair held by it.



**Robert Hooke, *Micrographia*, 1665.** This image of a louse under a microscope is the 35th scheme that Hooke refers to in the text above.

---

The thorax<sup>1</sup> seemed cased with another kind of substance than the belly, namely, with a thin transparent horny substance, which upon the fasting of the creature did not grow flaccid; through this I could plainly see the blood, sucked from my hand, to be variously distributed and moved to and fro; and about G there seemed a pretty big white substance, which seemed to be moved within its thorax; besides, there appeared very many small milk-white vessels, which crossed over the breast between the legs, out of which on either side were many small branchings, these seemed to be the veins and arteries, for that which is analogous to blood in all insects is milk-white.

The belly is covered with a transparent substance likewise, but more resembling a skin than a shell, for 'tis grained all over the belly just like the skin in the palms of a man's hand, and when the belly is empty grows very flaccid and wrinkled; at the upper end of this is placed the stomach HH, and perhaps also the white spot II may be the liver or pancreas, which, by the peristaltic motion<sup>2</sup> of the guts, is a little moved to and fro, not with a systole and diastole, but rather with a thronging or justling motion. Viewing one of these creatures after it had fasted two days, all the hinder part was lank and flaccid, and the white spot II hardly moved, most of the white branchings disappeared, and most also of the redness or sucked blood in the guts, the peristaltic motion of which was scarce discernable; but upon the suffering it to suck, it presently filled the skin of the belly, and of the six scalloped embossments<sup>3</sup> on either side, as full as it could be stuffed; the stomach and guts were as full as they could hold; the peristaltic motion of the gut grew quick, and the justling motion of II accordingly; multitudes of milk-white vessels seemed quickly filled and turgid,<sup>4</sup> which were perhaps the veins and arteries, and the creature was so greedy that though it could not contain more, yet it continued sucking as fast as ever and as fast emptying

itself behind: the digestion of this creature must needs be very quick, for though I perceived the blood thicker and blacker when sucked, yet, when in the guts, it was of a very lovely ruby color, and that part of it, which was digested into the veins, seemed white; whence it appears, that a further digestion of blood may make it milk, at least of a resembling color. What is else observable in the figure of this creature may be seen by the 35. *Scheme*.

## Endnotes

1665

- Note 1: Microscopes.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Human imperfection and error can be learned but is also “innate,” a product of the fall from perfection in Eden. Hooke was not alone in the period in hoping that science might act as a “reparation” for the Fall, bringing humans closer to lost, prelapsarian wisdom.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The different defects in sense, memory, and reason.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: For example, some things are too small for human eyes to perceive.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Futile.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Analogies.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, the confined limits of our ability to understand.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Experimental philosophy.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Nature was often personified as a woman, especially in relation to the male natural philosopher who wants to penetrate or reveal. “Shifts”: evasive movements. “Art”: cunning strategy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Exposed.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hooke uses the language of Robert Boyle’s theory of matter. Boyle held that the world was made of tiny atom-like corpuscles with only a few primary characteristics (shape, size, motion); these join together into distinct structures and textures. “Subtilty”: intricacy.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Philosophers in the tradition of Aristotle.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Practical (as opposed to speculative).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A version of the influential metaphor: since nature is machine-like, Hooke imagines being able to understand its inner workings as fully as he understands a machine's wheels and gears.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hooke famously depicts the natural philosopher as simply taking nature's dictation (though elsewhere in his book he emphasizes the skill required to work the microscope and create images and the knowledge used to make connections and draw conclusions).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Shameless. "Officious": eager. Hooke opens the observation with playful personification and punning.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A pun conjuring both the crown on the top part of the human head and the possibility that even royal heads get lice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The idiomatic "to pull by the ears," or to force obedience, rendered literal.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Also idiomatic, similar to "go against the grain."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A Roman god, a messenger. "Ill conditions of it": the bad characteristics of the louse.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The thirty-fifth illustration in the book, to which Hooke's description is keyed. "Expressed": represented.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Literally, forward vision.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Often, as here, Hooke's observations are not only a matter of "a sincere hand and a faithful eye." He himself acknowledges that his book contains "conjectures and queries" that might "seem more positive" than allowed by the Royal Society's "prescriptions" about "avoiding" hypothesizing "not sufficiently grounded and confirmed by experiments."[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Unlike later scientific prose that aspires to objectivity, Hooke uses the first person and depicts his own body as part of the observation.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Contraction and expansion—movements understood as central to the human heart and blood circulation. “Bellows”: machine to stoke a fire.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Covering. “*Cuticula*”: the outermost layer of skin. Note that this conclusion is about blood circulation in the human body.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Efficiently, compactly.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Part of the body around the neck and chest.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Involuntary bodily motion, especially in digestion.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Protuberances.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Bulging.[Return to reference 4](#)

## MARGARET CAVENDISH

Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle (1623–1673), was a natural philosopher who wrote several books working out her own original alternative to both the older Aristotelean and the newer “mechanical” theories of matter. She advocated instead for a vitalist materialism premised on the idea that matter is not inert but animate. Cavendish, a noblewoman, was fascinated by the new science but was also a fierce critic of the Royal Society’s particular brand of it. In *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666), Cavendish incorporates whole passages in italics from Hooke’s *Micrographia* (1665) and then offers her own point-by-point rebuttals—attacking Hooke’s understanding of nature, his methods, his reliance on technology, and his understanding of humanity’s place in the world.

Cavendish was also a prolific poet, playwright, essayist, and fiction writer, and the philosophical critique in her *Observations* was published alongside her work of fiction, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (see volume B of this anthology), which developed many of her objections. In *Blazing World*, an empress visiting another world encounters many fantastical creatures, including a group of “bear-men” obsessed with microscopes and telescopes. Dismayed at how the bear-men cannot agree on what they see, the empress orders them to break their useless instruments, but they beg pitifully. These obstinate philosophers then baldly admit that they “take more delight in artificial delusions, than in natural truths” and that, without their lenses, they would lose all the fun of “confuting and contradicting each other.” The empress relents for the moment but later forces the bear-men to dissolve their society, which—with other scientific societies in the *Blazing World*—was causing “contentions and divisions” that threatened the “ruin of the government.” Cavendish’s criticisms were philosophical, methodological, and social, and they



were asserted powerfully in both a philosophical treatise and a utopian fiction. Unfortunately, the Royal Society would not engage meaningfully with her ideas. She visited a meeting once in 1667, but the existing reports by men there that day focus more on her clothing than her comments. Philosophers today, however, *do* engage with her brand of materialism—they see that she deserved to be taken much more seriously.

# ***From Observations upon Experimental Philosophy***

## **[OF ART AND EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY]**

Some are of opinion, *that by art there can be a reparation made of the mischiefs and imperfections mankind has drawn upon itself by negligence and intemperance, and a willful and superstitious deserting the prescripts and rules of nature, whereby every man, both from a derived corruption, innate and born with him, and from his breeding and converse with men is very subject to slip into all sorts of errors.*<sup>1</sup> But the all-powerful God and his servant Nature know that art, which is but a particular creature,<sup>2</sup> cannot inform us of the truth of the infinite parts of Nature, being but finite itself; for though every creature has a double perception, rational and sensitive, yet each creature or part has not an infinite perception; nay, although each particular creature or part of nature may have some conceptions of the infinite parts of nature, yet it cannot know the truth of those infinite parts, being but a finite part itself, which finiteness causes errors in perceptions; wherefore it is well said, when they confess themselves, *that the uncertainty and mistakes of human actions proceed either from the narrowness and wandering of our senses, or from the slipperiness or delusion of our memory, or from the confinement or rashness of our understanding.* But, say they, *It is no wonder that our power over natural causes and effects is so slowly improved, seeing we are not only to contend with the obscurity and difficulty of the things whereon we work and think, but even the forces of our minds conspire to betray us: And these being the dangers in the process of human reason, the remedies can only proceed from the real, the mechanical, the experimental philosophy, which has this advantage over the philosophy of discourse and disputation, that whereas that chiefly aims at the subtilty of its*

*deductions and conclusions, without much regard to the first groundwork, which ought to be well laid on the sense and memory, so this intends the right ordering of them all, and making them serviceable to each other.*<sup>3</sup> In which discourse I do not understand, first, what they mean by our power over natural causes and effects; for we have no power at all over natural causes and effects, but only one particular effect may have some power over another, which are natural actions; but neither can natural causes nor effects be overpowered by man so, as if man was a degree above nature, but they must be as nature is pleased to order them; for man is but a small part, and his powers are but particular actions of nature, and therefore he cannot have a supreme and absolute power. Next, I say, that sense,<sup>4</sup> which is more apt to be deluded than reason, cannot be the ground of reason, no more than art can be the ground of nature: wherefore discourse shall sooner find or trace nature's corporeal figurative motions,<sup>5</sup> than deluding arts can inform the senses; for how can a fool order his understanding by art, if nature has made it defective? Or how can a wise man trust his senses, if either the objects be not truly presented according to their natural figure and shape, or if the senses be defective, either through age, sickness, or other accidents, which do alter the natural motions proper to each sense? And hence I conclude, that experimental and mechanic philosophy cannot be above the speculative part, by reason most experiments have their rise from the speculative, so that the artist or mechanic is but a servant to the student.

#### **[OF MICROGRAPHY, AND OF MAGNIFYING AND MULTIPLYING GLASSES]**

Although I am not able to give a solid judgment of the art of micrography, and the several dioptrical instruments<sup>6</sup> belonging thereto, by reason I have neither studied nor practiced that art; yet of this I am confident, that this same art, with all its instruments, is not able to discover the interior natural motions of any part or creature of nature; nay, the question is, whether it can represent yet the exterior shapes and motions so exactly, as naturally they are; for

art doth more easily alter than inform: as for example, art makes cylinders, concave and convex-glasses, and the like, which represent the figure of an object in no part exactly and truly, but very deformed and misshaped: also a glass that is flawed, cracked, or broke, or cut into the figure of lozenges,<sup>7</sup> triangles, squares, or the like will present numerous pictures of one object. Besides, there are so many alterations made by several lights, their shadows, refractions, reflections, as also several lines, points, mediums, interposing and intermixing parts, forms and positions, as the truth of an object will hardly be known; for the perception of sight, and so of the rest of the senses, goes no further than the exterior parts of the object presented; and though the perception may be true, when the object is truly presented, yet when the presentation is false, the information must be false also. And it is to be observed, that art, for the most part, makes hermaphroditical,<sup>8</sup> that is, mixed figures, as partly artificial and partly natural: for art may make some metal, as pewter, which is between tin and lead, as also brass, and numerous other things of mixed natures; in the like manner may artificial glasses present objects, partly natural and partly artificial; nay, put the case they can present the natural figure of an object, yet that natural figure may be presented in as monstrous a shape, as it may appear misshapen rather than natural. For example, a louse by the help of a magnifying glass<sup>9</sup> appears like a lobster, where the microscope enlarging and magnifying each part of it makes them bigger and rounder than naturally they are. The truth is, the more the figure by art is magnified, the more it appears misshapen from the natural, in so much as each joint will appear as a diseased, swelled and tumid body, ready and ripe for incision. But mistake me not; I do not say that no glass presents the true picture of an object; but only that magnifying, multiplying, and the like optic glasses may, and do oftentimes present falsely the picture of an exterior object; I say, the picture, because it is not the real body of the object which the glass presents, but the glass only figures or patterns out the picture presented in and by the glass, and there may easily mistakes be committed in taking copies from copies. Nay,

artists do confess themselves, that flies and the like will appear of several figures or shapes, according to the several reflections, refractions, mediums and positions of several lights;<sup>1</sup> which if so, how can they tell or judge which is the truest light, position, or medium, that doth present the object naturally as it is? And if not, then an edge may very well seem flat, and a point of a needle a globe; but if the edge of a knife or point of a needle<sup>2</sup> were naturally and really so as the microscope presents them, they would never be so useful as they are; for a flat or broad plain-edged knife would not cut, nor a blunt globe pierce so suddenly another body, neither would or could they pierce without tearing and rending, if their bodies were so uneven; and if the picture of a young beautiful lady should be drawn according to the representation of the microscope, or according to the various refraction and reflection of light through such like glasses, it would be so far from being like her, as it would not be like a human face, but rather a monster, than a picture of nature. Wherefore those that invented microscopes and such like dioptrical glasses at first did, in my opinion, the world more injury than benefit; for this art has intoxicated so many men's brains, and wholly employed their thoughts and bodily actions about phenomena, or the exterior figures of objects, as all better arts and studies are laid aside; nay, those that are not as earnest and active in such employments as they, are, by many of them, accounted unprofitable subjects to the Commonwealth of Learning. But though there be numerous books written of the wonders of these glasses, yet I cannot perceive any such, at best, they are but superficial wonders, as I may call them. But could experimental philosophers find out more beneficial arts than our forefathers have done, either for the better increase of vegetables and brute animals to nourish our bodies, or better and commodious contrivances in the art of architecture to build us houses, or for the advancing of trade and traffic to provide necessities for us to live, or for the decrease of nice<sup>3</sup> distinctions and sophistical disputes in churches, schools and courts of judicature to make men live in unity, peace and neighborly friendship, it would not only be worth their labor, but of as much

praise as could be given to them.<sup>4</sup> But as boys that play with watery bubbles,<sup>5</sup> or fling dust<sup>6</sup> into each other's eyes, or make a hobby-horse<sup>7</sup> of snow are worthy of reproof rather than praise, for wasting their time with useless sports; so those that addict themselves to unprofitable arts spend more time than they reap benefit thereby. Nay, could they benefit men either in husbandry, architecture, or the like necessary and profitable employments, yet before the vulgar sort would learn to understand them, the world would want<sup>8</sup> bread to eat, and houses to dwell in, as also clothes to keep them from the inconveniences of the inconstant weather. But truly, although spinsters were most experienced in this art, yet they will never be able to spin silk, thread, or wool, etc. from loose atoms; neither will weavers weave a web of light from the sun's rays, nor an architect build an house of the bubbles of water and air, unless they be poetical spinsters, weavers and architects; and if a painter should draw a louse as big as a crab, and of that shape as the microscope presents, can anybody imagine that a beggar would believe it to be true? But if he did, what advantage would it be to the beggar? For it doth neither instruct him how to avoid breeding them, or how to catch them, or to hinder them from biting.<sup>9</sup> Again: if a painter should paint birds according to those colors the microscope presents, what advantage would it be for fowlers<sup>1</sup> to take them? Truly, no fowler will be able to distinguish several birds through a microscope, neither by their shapes nor colors; they will be better discerned by those that eat their flesh, than by micrographers that look upon their colors and exterior figures through a magnifying-glass.<sup>2</sup> In short, magnifying-glasses are like a high heel to a short leg, which if it be made too high, it is apt to make the wearer fall, and at the best, can do no more than represent exterior figures in a bigger, and so in a more deformed shape and posture than naturally they are; but as for the interior form and motions of a creature, as I said before, they can no more represent them, than telescopes can the interior essence and nature of the sun, and what matter it consists of; for if one that never had seen milk before should look upon it through a microscope, he would never be able to discover

the interior parts of milk by that instrument, were it the best that is in the world; neither the whey, nor the butter, nor the curds. Wherefore the best optic is a perfect natural eye and a regular sensitive perception, and the best judge is reason, and the best study is rational contemplation joined with the observations of regular sense, but not deluding arts; for art is not only gross in comparison to nature, but, for the most part, deformed and defective, and at best produces mixed or hermaphroditical figures, that is, a third figure between nature and art: which proves, that natural reason is above artificial sense, as I may call it: wherefore those arts are the best and surest informers that alter nature least, and they the greatest deluders that alter nature most, I mean, the particular nature of each particular creature; (for art is so far from altering infinite Nature, that it is no more in comparison to it than a little fly to an elephant, no not so much, for there is no comparison between finite and infinite). But wise Nature taking delight in variety, her parts, which are her creatures, must of necessity do so too.

## Endnotes

1666

- Note 1: A passage from Hooke's Preface (see p. 101 above). In quoting, Cavendish makes small changes to Hooke's sentences.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A created thing, hence not infinite and divine. "Art": artificial things made by humans.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Also from Hooke's Preface (see [p. 102](#)).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sensory perception.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cavendish's *Philosophical Letters* (1664) insist, against the mechanical philosophy: "whosoever will study nature must consider the figures of every creature, as well as their motions, and must not make abstractions of motion and figure from matter, nor of matter from motion and figure, for they are inseparable as being but one thing, viz. corporeal figurative motions."[Return to reference 5](#)



- Note 6: Instruments for intensifying vision that use light refraction, not reflection.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A diamond shape. "Glass": mirror.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The word comes from the myth (famously told by Ovid) of Hermaphroditus, whose originally male body gets permanently combined with a female nymph's body.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Microscope. She refers specifically to Hooke's image of the louse (see p. 105).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Hooke acknowledged this "difficulty," while trying to hedge against it: "the same object seeming quite differing, in one position to the light, from what it really is and may be discovered in another. And therefore I never began to make any draught [of an illustration] before many examinations in several lights, in several positions to those lights, I had discovered the true form."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hooke featured illustrations of a razor's edge and needle's point under the microscope.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Over-precise, fussy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Against Royal Society rhetoric about useful knowledge, Cavendish argues that they have not yet produced anything beneficial.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Glass tubes [*Cavendish's note*]. In this sentence, Cavendish likens key scientific concepts to children's play, as a way of emphasizing their unimportance and superficiality.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Atoms [*Cavendish's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Exterior figures [*Cavendish's note*]. She imagines children shaping snow into a horse figure.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lack. "Husbandry": agriculture.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Repeating this point, Cavendish has the empress of the Blazing World ask the bear-men who show her a louse under the microscope if they "could hinder" lice from "biting, or least show some means how to avoid them." The microscopists say no, explaining that such practical issues are "below" their "noble study."[Return to reference 9](#)



- Note 1: Bird hunters.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This critique was voiced even within the Royal Society. John Locke suggested that a person with “microscopical eyes . . . would not make any great advantage by the change, if such an acute sight would not serve to conduct him to the market and exchange; if he could not see things he was to avoid, at a convenient distance” or even read a clock.[Return to reference 2](#)

# SIR ISAAC NEWTON

Isaac Newton (1642–1727) was the posthumous son of a Lincolnshire farmer. As a boy, he invented machines; as an undergraduate, he made major discoveries in optics and mathematics; and in 1667—at twenty-five—he was elected a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Two years later his teacher, Isaac Barrow, resigned the Lucasian Chair of Mathematics in his favor. By then, in secret, Newton had already begun to rethink the universe. His mind worked incessantly, at the highest level of insight, both theoretical and experimental. He designed the first reflecting telescope and explained why the sky looks blue; contemporaneously with Leibniz, he invented calculus; he revolutionized the study of mechanics and physics with three basic laws of motion; and as everyone knows, he discovered the universal law of gravity. Although Newton's *Principia Mathematica* (*Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, 1687) made possible the modern understanding of the cosmos, his *Opticks* (1704) had a still greater impact on his contemporaries, not only for its discoveries about light and color but also for its formulation of a proper scientific method. All the while he retained a lifelong fascination with alchemy and religious studies, and these pursuits overlapped with his science.

Newton reported most of his scientific findings in Latin, the language of international scholarship; but when he chose, he could express himself in crisp and vigorous English. His early experiments on light and color were described in a letter to Henry Oldenburg, secretary of the Royal Society, and quickly published in the society's journal. By analyzing the spectrum, Newton had discovered something amazing, the "oddest if not the most considerable detection, which hath hitherto been made in the operations of nature": light is not homogeneous, as everyone thought, but a compound of heterogeneous rays, and white is not the absence of color but a composite of all sorts of colors. Newton assumes that a

clear account of his experiments and reasoning will compel assent; when, at the end of his summary, he drops a very heavy word, he clinches the point like a carpenter nailing a box shut. But other scientists resisted the theory. In years to come, Newton would become master of the mint in London and president of the Royal Society. All the while, his fame would continue to grow. "There could be only one Newton," Napoleon was told a century later: "there was only one world to discover."

# ***From A Letter of Mr. Isaac Newton, Professor of the Mathematics in the University of Cambridge, Containing His New Theory about Light and Colors***

***Sent by the Author to the Publisher from Cambridge, Febr.  
6, 1672, in order to Be Communicated to the Royal Society***

Sir,

To perform my late promise to you, I shall without further ceremony acquaint you that in the beginning of the year 1666 (at which time I applied myself to the grinding of optic glasses of other figures than spherical) I procured me a triangular glass prism to try therewith the celebrated phenomena of colors. And in order thereto having darkened my chamber and made a small hole in my window-shuts to let in a convenient quantity of the sun's light, I placed my prism at his entrance that it might be thereby refracted<sup>1</sup> to the opposite wall. It was at first a very pleasing divertissement to view the vivid and intense colors produced thereby; but after a while, applying myself to consider them more circumspectly, I became surprised to see them in an *oblong* form, which according to the received laws of refraction I expected should have been *circular*.

They were terminated at the sides with straight lines, but at the ends the decay of light was so gradual that it was difficult to determine justly what was their figure; yet they seemed *semicircular*.

Comparing the length of this colored spectrum with its breadth, I found it about five times greater, a disproportion so extravagant that it excited me to a more than ordinary curiosity of examining from whence it might proceed. I could scarce think that the various thickness of the glass or the termination with shadow or darkness could have any influence on light to produce such an effect; yet I

thought it not amiss first to examine those circumstances, and so tried what would happen by transmitting light through parts of the glass of divers thicknesses, or through holes in the window of divers bignesses, or by setting the prism without, so that the light might pass through it and be refracted before it was terminated by the hole. But I found none of those circumstances material. The fashion of the colors was in all these cases the same.

Then I suspected whether by any unevenness in the glass or other contingent irregularity these colors might be thus dilated. And to try this, I took another prism like the former and so placed it that the light, passing through them both, might be refracted contrary ways, and so by the latter returned into that course from which the former had diverted it. For by this means I thought the regular effects of the first prism would be destroyed by the second prism, but the irregular ones more augmented by the multiplicity of refractions. The event was that the light, which by the first prism was diffused into an oblong form, was by the second reduced into an orbicular one with as much regularity as when it did not at all pass through them. So that, whatever was the cause of that length, 'twas not any contingent irregularity.<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

The gradual removal of these suspicions at length led me to the *experimentum crucis*,<sup>3</sup> which was this: I took two boards, and placed one of them close behind the prism at the window, so that the light might pass through a small hole made in it for the purpose and fall on the other board, which I placed at about 12 foot distance, having first made a small hole in it also, for some of that incident<sup>4</sup> light to pass through. Then I placed another prism behind this second board so that the light, trajected through both the boards, might pass through that also, and be again refracted before it arrived at the wall. This done, I took the first prism in my hand, and turned it to and fro slowly about its axis, so much as to make the several parts of the image, cast on the second board,

successively pass through the hole in it, that I might observe to what places on the wall the second prism would refract them. And I saw by the variation of those places that the light, tending to that end of the image towards which the refraction of the first prism was made, did in the second prism suffer a refraction considerably greater than the light tending to the other end. And so the true cause of the length of that image was detected to be no other than that light consists of *rays differently refrangible*, which, without any respect to a difference in their incidence, were, according to their degrees of refrangibility, transmitted towards divers parts of the wall.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

I shall now proceed to acquaint you with another more notable difformity<sup>6</sup> in its rays, wherein the *origin of colors* is infolded. A naturalist<sup>7</sup> would scarce expect to see the science of those become mathematical, and yet I dare affirm that there is as much certainty in it as in any other part of optics. For what I shall tell concerning them is not an hypothesis but most rigid consequence, not conjectured by barely inferring 'tis thus because not otherwise or because it satisfied all phenomena (the philosophers' universal topic) but evinced by the mediation of experiments concluding directly and without any suspicion of doubt. \* \* \*

The doctrine you will find comprehended and illustrated in the following propositions.

1. As the rays of light differ in degrees of refrangibility, so they also differ in their disposition to exhibit this or that particular color. Colors are not *qualifications of light*, derived from refractions or reflections of natural bodies (as 'tis generally believed), but *original and connate properties* which in divers rays are divers. Some rays are disposed to exhibit a red color and no other; some a yellow and no other, some a green and no other, and so of the rest. Nor are there only rays proper and particular to the more eminent colors, but even to all their intermediate gradations.

2. To the same degree of refrangibility ever belongs the same color, and to the same color ever belongs the same degree of refrangibility. The least refrangible rays are all disposed to exhibit a red color, and contrarily those rays which are disposed to exhibit a red color are all the least refrangible. So the most refrangible rays are all disposed to exhibit a deep violet color, and contrarily those which are apt to exhibit such a violet color are all the most refrangible. And so to all the intermediate colors in a continued series belong intermediate degrees of refrangibility. And this analogy 'twixt colors and refrangibility is very precise and strict; the rays always either exactly agreeing in both or proportionally disagreeing in both.

3. The species of color and degree of refrangibility proper to any particular sort of rays is not mutable by refraction, nor by reflection from natural bodies, nor by any other cause that I could yet observe. When any one sort of rays hath been well parted from those of other kinds, it hath afterwards obstinately retained its color, notwithstanding my utmost endeavors to change it. I have refracted it with prisms and reflected it with bodies which in daylight were of other colors; I have intercepted it with the colored film of air interceding two compressed plates of glass; transmitted it through colored mediums and through mediums irradiated with other sorts of rays, and diversely terminated it; and yet could never produce any new color out of it. It would by contracting or dilating become more brisk or faint and by the loss of many rays in some cases very obscure and dark; but I could never see it changed *in specie*.<sup>8</sup>

4. Yet seeming transmutations of colors may be made, where there is any mixture of divers sorts of rays. For in such mixtures, the component colors appear not, but by their mutual allaying each other constitute a middling color. And therefore, if by refraction or any other of the aforesaid causes the difform rays latent in such a mixture be separated, there shall emerge colors different from the color of the composition. Which colors are not new generated, but only made apparent by being parted; for if they be again entirely mixed and blended together, they will again compose that color

which they did before separation. And for the same reason, transmutations made by the convening of divers colors are not real; for when the difform rays are again severed, they will exhibit the very same colors which they did before they entered the composition—as you see blue and yellow powders when finely mixed appear to the naked eye green, and yet the colors of the component corpuscles are not thereby transmuted, but only blended. For, when viewed with a good microscope, they still appear blue and yellow interspersedly.

5. There are therefore two sorts of colors: the one original and simple, the other compounded of these. The original or primary colors are red, yellow, green, blue, and a violet-purple, together with orange, indigo, and an indefinite variety of intermediate graduations.

6. The same colors *in specie* with these primary ones may be also produced by composition. For a mixture of yellow and blue makes green; of red and yellow makes orange; of orange and yellowish green makes yellow. And in general, if any two colors be mixed which, in the series of those generated by the prism, are not too far distant one from another, they by their mutual alloy compound that color which in the said series appeareth in the mid-way between them. But those which are situated at too great a distance, do not so. Orange and indigo produce not the intermediate green, nor scarlet and green the intermediate yellow.

7. But the most surprising and wonderful composition was that of *whiteness*. There is no one sort of rays which alone can exhibit this. 'Tis ever compounded, and to its composition are requisite all the aforesaid primary colors, mixed in a due proportion. I have often with admiration beheld that all the colors of the prism, being made to converge, and thereby to be again mixed as they were in the light before it was incident upon the prism, reproduced light entirely and perfectly white, and not at all sensibly differing from a direct light of the sun, unless when the glasses I used were not sufficiently clear; for then they would a little incline it to *their* color.

8. Hence therefore it comes to pass that *whiteness* is the usual color of light, for light is a confused aggregate of rays endued with



all sorts of colors, as they are promiscuously darted from the various parts of luminous bodies. And of such a confused aggregate, as I said, is generated whiteness, if there be a due proportion of the ingredients; but if any one predominate, the light must incline to that color, as it happens in the blue flame of brimstone, the yellow flame of a candle, and the various colors of the fixed stars.

9. These things considered, the manner how colors are produced by the prism is evident. For of the rays constituting the incident light, since those which differ in color proportionally differ in refrangibility, they by their unequal refractions must be severed and dispersed into an oblong form in an orderly succession from the least refracted scarlet to the most refracted violet. And for the same reason it is that objects, when looked upon through a prism, appear colored. For the difform rays, by their unequal refractions, are made to diverge towards several parts of the retina, and there express the images of things colored, as in the former case they did the sun's image upon a wall. And by this inequality of refractions they become not only colored, but also very confused and indistinct.

10. Why the colors of the rainbow appear in falling drops of rain is also from hence evident. For those drops which refract the rays disposed to appear purple in greatest quantity to the spectator's eye, refract the rays of other sorts so much less as to make them pass beside it;<sup>9</sup> and such are the drops on the inside of the primary bow and on the outside of the secondary or exterior one. So those drops which refract in greatest plenty the rays apt to appear red toward the spectator's eye, refract those of other sorts so much more as to make them pass beside it; and such are the drops on the exterior part of the primary and interior part of the secondary bow.

## Endnotes

1672

- Note 1: That is, that the light's direction might be diverted from a straight path.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Newton goes on to describe several experiments and calculations by which he disposed of alternative theories—that

rays coming from different parts of the sun caused the diffusion of light into an oblong or that the rays of light traveled in curved paths after leaving the prism.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Crucial experiment (Latin); turning point.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From the Latin *incidere*, to fall into or onto. Newton uses it in reference to light striking an obstacle.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: This insight enables Newton to design a greatly improved telescope, which uses reflections to correct the distortions caused by the scattering of refracted rays. He adds in passing that his experiments were interrupted for two years by the plague; but at last he returns to some further and even more important characteristics of light. "Refrangible": susceptible to being refracted.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Diversity of forms.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A student of physics or "natural philosophy."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In kind.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, disappear alongside it.[Return to reference 9](#)

## JOHN LOCKE

John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) is "a history-book," according to Laurence Sterne, "of what passes in a man's own mind." Like Montaigne's essays, it aims to explore the human mind in general by closely watching one particular mind. When Locke (1632–1704) analyzed his ideas, the ways they were acquired and put together, he found they were clear when they were based on direct sensed experience and adequate when they were clear. Usually, it appeared, problems occurred when basic ideas were blurred or confused or did not refer to anything determinate. Thus a critical analysis of the ideas in an individual mind could lead straight to a rule about adequate ideas in general and the sort of subject where adequate ideas were possible. On the basis of such a limitation, individuals might reach rational agreement with one another.

Locke's new "way of ideas" strikes a humble, antidogmatic note, but readers quickly perceived its far-reaching implications. By basing knowledge on the ideas immediately "before the mind," Locke comports with and helps codify the movement of his times away from the authority of traditions of medieval, scholastic philosophy. His understanding of how the mind works—empirically and inductively, building up from sensed particulars—bolstered the scientific project. His approach also alarmed some divines who argued that the foundation of human life—the mysteries of faith—could never be reduced to clear, distinct ideas. Locke indirectly accepts the Christian scriptures in the *Essay* in the midst of his famous critique of "enthusiasm," the belief in private revelation, but his main impulse is to restrain rather than to encourage religious speculations. (His fullest theological work, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 1695, argues that scriptural revelation is necessary for right-thinking people but not incompatible with ordinary reasonable beliefs gathered from personal experience and history.) The *Essay*

also contains an unsettling discussion of personal identity (in the chapter "Of Identity and Diversity" added to the second edition in 1694). Locke argues that a person's sense of selfhood derives not from the "identity of soul" but rather from "consciousness of present and past actions": I am myself now because I remember my past, not because a unique substance ("me") underlies everything I experience. This account drew critical responses from numerous distinguished thinkers throughout the eighteenth century.

Locke spent his life in thought. His background and connections were all with the Puritan movement, but he was disillusioned early with the enthusiastic moods and persecutions to which he found the Puritans prone. Having a small but steady private income, he became a student, chiefly at Oxford, learning enough medicine to act as a physician and becoming interested in new currents in natural philosophy. He was later made a fellow of the Royal Society. After 1667, he was personal physician and tutor in the household of a violent, crafty politician, the first Earl of Shaftesbury (Dryden's "Achitophel"). But Locke himself was always a grave, dispassionate man. On one occasion, Shaftesbury's political enemies at Oxford had Locke watched for several years on end, during which he was not heard to say one word either critical of the government or favorable to it. When times are turbulent, so much discretion is suspicious in itself, and Locke found it convenient to go abroad for several years during the 1680s. He lived quietly in Holland and pursued his thoughts. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the accession of William III brought him back to England and made possible the publication of the *Essay*, on which he had been working for many years. Its publication foreshadowed the coming age, not only in the positive ideas that the book advanced but in the quiet way it set aside as insoluble a range of problems about absolute authority and absolute assurance that had torn society apart earlier in the seventeenth century.

# ***From An Essay Concerning Human Understanding***

## ***From The Epistle to the Reader***

Reader,

I here put into thy hands what has been the diversion of some of my idle and heavy hours; if it has the good luck to prove so of any of thine, and thou hast but half so much pleasure in reading as I had in writing it, thou wilt as little think thy money, as I do my pains, ill-bestowed. Mistake not this for a commendation of my work; nor conclude, because I was pleased with the doing of it, that therefore I am fondly taken with it now it is done. He that hawks at larks and sparrows, has no less sport, though a much less considerable quarry, than he that flies at nobler game: and he is little acquainted with the subject of this treatise, the Understanding, who does not know, that as it is the most elevated faculty of the soul, so it is employed with a greater and more constant delight than any of the other. Its searches after truth are a sort of hawking and hunting, wherein the very pursuit makes a great part of the pleasure. Every step the mind takes in its progress towards knowledge makes some discovery, which is not only new, but the best, too, for the time at least.

For the understanding, like the eye, judging of objects only by its own sight, cannot but be pleased with what it discovers, having less regret for what has escaped it, because it is unknown. Thus he who has raised himself above the alms-basket, and, not content to live lazily on scraps of begged opinions, sets his own thoughts on work to find and follow truth, will (whatever he lights on) not miss the hunter's satisfaction; every moment of his pursuit will reward his pains with some delight, and he will have reason to think his time not ill-spent, even when he cannot much boast of any great acquisition.

This, reader, is the entertainment of those who let loose their own thoughts, and follow them in writing; which thou oughtest not to envy them, since they afford thee an opportunity of the like diversion, if thou wilt make use of thy own thoughts in reading. It is to them, if they are thy own, that I refer myself; but if they are taken upon trust from others, it is no great matter what they are, they not following truth, but some meaner consideration; and it is not worthwhile to be concerned what he says or thinks, who says or thinks only as he is directed by another. If thou judgest for thyself, I know thou wilt judge candidly; and then I shall not be harmed or offended, whatever be thy censure. For, though it be certain that there is nothing in this treatise of the truth whereof I am not fully persuaded, yet I consider myself as liable to mistakes as I can think thee; and know that this book must stand or fall with thee, not by any opinion I have of it, but thy own. If thou findest little in it new or instructive to thee, thou art not to blame me for it. It was not meant for those that had already mastered this subject, and made a thorough acquaintance with their own understandings, but for my own information, and the satisfaction of a few friends, who acknowledged themselves not to have sufficiently considered it. Were it fit to trouble thee with the history of this Essay, I should tell thee, that five or six friends, meeting at my chamber, and discoursing on a subject very remote from this, found themselves quickly at a stand by the difficulties that rose on every side. After we had awhile puzzled ourselves, without coming any nearer a resolution of those doubts which perplexed us, it came into my thoughts, that we took a wrong course; and that, before we set ourselves upon inquiries of that nature, it was necessary to examine our own abilities, and see what objects our understandings were or were not fitted to deal with. This I proposed to the company, who all readily assented; and thereupon it was agreed, that this should be our first inquiry. Some hasty and undigested thoughts, on a subject I had never before considered, which I set down against<sup>1</sup> our next meeting, gave the first entrance into this discourse, which, having been thus begun by chance, was continued by entreaty; written by

incoherent parcels; and, after long intervals of neglect, resumed again, as my humor or occasions permitted; and at last, in a retirement, where an attendance on my health gave me leisure, it was brought into that order thou now seest it.

This discontinued way of writing may have occasioned, besides others, two contrary faults; viz., that too little and too much may be said in it. If thou findest anything wanting, I shall be glad that what I have writ gives thee any desire that I should have gone farther: if it seems too much to thee, thou must blame the subject; for when I first put pen to paper, I thought all I should have to say on this matter would have been contained in one sheet of paper; but the farther I went, the larger prospect I had: new discoveries led me still on, and so it grew insensibly to the bulk it now appears in. I will not deny but possibly it might be reduced to a narrower compass than it is; and that some parts of it might be contracted; the way it has been writ in, by catches,<sup>2</sup> and many long intervals of interruption, being apt to cause some repetitions. But, to confess the truth, I am now too lazy or too busy to make it shorter.

\* \* \* I pretend not to publish this Essay for the information of men of large thoughts and quick apprehensions; to such masters of knowledge, I profess myself a scholar, and therefore warn them beforehand not to expect anything here but what, being spun out of my own coarse thoughts, is fitted to men of my own size, to whom, perhaps, it will not be unacceptable that I have taken some pains to make plain and familiar to their thoughts some truths, which established prejudice or the abstractness of the ideas themselves might render difficult.

\* \* \*

The commonwealth of learning is not at this time without master-builders, whose mighty designs in advancing, the sciences will leave lasting monuments to the admiration of posterity: but everyone must not hope to be a Boyle or a Sydenham; and in an age that produces such masters as the great Huygenius, and the

incomparable Mr. Newton,<sup>3</sup> with some other of that strain, it is ambition enough to be employed as an under-laborer in clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge; which certainly had been very much more advanced in the world, if the endeavors of ingenious and industrious men had not been much cumbered with the learned but frivolous use of uncouth, affected, or unintelligible terms introduced into the sciences, and there made an art of to that degree that philosophy, which is nothing but the true knowledge of things, was thought unfit or incapable to be brought into well-bred company and polite conversation.<sup>4</sup> Vague and insignificant forms of speech, and abuse of language, have so long passed for mysteries of science; and hard or misapplied words, with little or no meaning, have, by prescription, such a right to be mistaken for deep learning and height of speculation; that it will not be easy to persuade either those who speak or those who hear them, that they are but the covers of ignorance, and hindrance of true knowledge. \* \* \*

The booksellers, preparing for the fourth edition of my Essay, gave me notice of it, that I might, if I had leisure, make any additions or alterations I should think fit. Whereupon I thought it convenient to advertise the reader, that besides several corrections I had made here and there, there was one alteration which it was necessary to mention, because it ran through the whole book, and is of consequence to be rightly understood. What I thereupon said, was this:—

“Clear and distinct ideas” are terms which, though familiar and frequent in men’s mouths, I have reason to think everyone who uses does not perfectly understand. And possibly it is but here and there one who gives himself the trouble to consider them so far as to know what he himself or others precisely mean by them. I have therefore, in most places, chose to put “determinate” or “determined,”<sup>5</sup> instead of “clear” and “distinct,” as more likely to direct men’s thoughts to my meaning in this matter. By those denominations, I mean some object in the mind, and consequently



determined, i.e., such as it is there seen and perceived to be. This, I think, may fitly be called a "determinate" or "determined" idea, when such as it is at any time objectively in the mind, and so determined there, it is annexed, and without variation determined, to a name or articulate sound which is to be steadily the sign of that very same object of the mind, or determinate idea.

To explain this a little more particularly: By "determinate," when applied to a simple idea, I mean that simple appearance which the mind has in its view, or perceives in itself, when that idea is said to be in it. By "determined," when applied to a complex idea, I mean such an one as consists of a determinate number of certain simple or less complex ideas, joined in such a proportion and situation as the mind has before its view, and sees in itself, when that idea is present in it, or should be present in it, when a man gives a name to it. I say "should be"; because it is not everyone, nor perhaps anyone, who is so careful of his language as to use no word till he views in his mind the precise determined idea which he resolves to make it the sign of. The want of this is the cause of no small obscurity and confusion in men's thoughts and discourses.

I know there are not words enough in any language to answer all the variety of ideas that enter into men's discourses and reasonings. But this hinders not but that when anyone uses any term, he may have in his mind a determined idea which he makes it the sign of, and to which he should keep it steadily annexed during that present discourse. Where he does not or cannot do this, he in vain pretends to clear or distinct ideas: it is plain his are not so; and therefore there can be expected nothing but obscurity and confusion, where such terms are made use of which have not such a precise determination.

Upon this ground I have thought "determined ideas" a way of speaking less liable to mistake than "clear and distinct"; and where men have got such determined ideas of all that they reason, inquire, or argue about, they will find a great part of their doubts and disputes at an end; the greatest part of the questions and controversies that perplex mankind depending on the doubtful and

uncertain use of words, or (which is the same) indetermined ideas, which they are made to stand for. I have made choice of these terms to signify, 1. Some immediate object of the mind, which it perceives and has before it, distinct from the sound it uses as a sign of it. 2. That this idea, thus determined, i.e., which the mind has in itself, and knows and sees there, be determined without any change to that name, and that name determined to that precise idea. If men had such determined ideas in their inquiries and discourses, they would both discern how far their own inquiries and discourses went, and avoid the greatest part of the disputes and wranglings they have with others.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1690, 1700

- Note 1: Before. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fragments. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sir Isaac Newton. Robert Boyle, the great Anglo-Irish chemist and physicist. Thomas Sydenham, a physician and authority on the treatment of fevers. Christiaan Huygens, Dutch mathematician and astronomer. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Locke was tutor to Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, whose philosophical writings make of genteel social conversation and civilized good humor something like guides to ultimate truth. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Definite, limited, fixed in value. [Return to reference 5](#)

## ROBERT BOYLE

Robert Boyle (1627–1691), the Anglo-Irish son of a powerful earl, brought his gentlemanly status and his considerable learning and skill in experimentation to his advocacy of science. Boyle became interested in natural philosophy and experiment in the late 1640s and in the 1650s attended the meetings that John Wilkins hosted for like-minded thinkers in Oxford. This group—whose meetings Boyle would later host in his own house—formed the core of what would become the Royal Society: Boyle was at the Society's first official meeting and would become a powerful representative of its scientific program. Against those who complained that the Royal Society had "done nothing" significant in its early years, one contemporary, Joseph Glanvill, wrote that "the Illustrious Mr. Boyle" had single-handedly "done enough" that, if he "lived in those days, when men *godded* their benefactors, he could not have missed one of the first places among their deified mortals."

Boyle's scientific publications are too many to list. He is best known to students today for "Boyle's law" concerning air pressure. This discovery was part of his influential work with the air pump, a piece of cutting-edge scientific equipment with a vacuum chamber. Boyle also influentially challenged the older Aristotelian ideas about the nature of matter still being taught in schools. He argued, instead, for a "mechanical philosophy," and he worked out a doctrine of "corpuscularianism," in which little atom-like corpuscles compose everything—though his use of "corpuscle" instead of "atom" helped him distinguish what he understood as his Christian philosophy from the atheism of ancient atomism. Indeed, a central theme of Boyle's work throughout his career was the compatibility of science and his Christian religion. This was part of Boyle's legacy too: upon his death, his will founded a series of influential "Boyle lectures" in defense of Christianity.

Boyle had an extremely various and active research agenda. The “General Heads,” included here, were among Boyle’s many publications in the *Philosophical Transactions* and reflect another aspect of his scientific program: his interest in the larger-scale projects of information collection promoted by Francis Bacon. Here, Boyle outlines a series of inquiries that any natural historian could ask about the places they traveled, and the Royal Society was interested in collecting answers from all over the globe. Such a project enacted the empiricist idea that collecting particulars might lead to eventual generalizations and insights, which in turn might provide a foundation “to superstruct,” or build, a whole philosophy upon. Boyle’s inquiries also illuminate science’s close links with early imperial projects and its interest in racial and geographical differences. What we today might think of as separate realms of nature and culture are closely intertwined here.

# General Heads for a Natural History of a Country, Great or Small<sup>1</sup>

It having been already intimated (*Num. 8 of Phil. Transact.* [p. 140](#), 141)<sup>2</sup> that diverse philosophers aim, among other things, at the composing of a good natural history, to superstruct in time a solid and useful philosophy upon; and it being of no slight importance to be furnished with pertinent heads,<sup>3</sup> for the direction of inquirers; that lately named benefactor to experimental philosophy<sup>4</sup> has been pleased to communicate, for the ends abovesaid, the following articles, which (as himself did signify) belong to one of his essays of the unpublished part of the *Usefulness of Nat. and Experimen. Philosophy*.<sup>5</sup>

But first he premises, that what follows is designed only to point at the more general heads of inquiry, which the proposer ignores not to be diverse of them very comprehensive,<sup>6</sup> in so much that, about some of the subordinate subjects, perhaps too not the most fertile, he has drawn up articles of inquisition about particulars, that take up near as much room as what is here to be delivered of this matter.<sup>7</sup>

The Heads themselves follow;

The things to be observed in such a history may be variously (and almost at pleasure) divided: As, into *supraterraneous*, *terrestrial*, and *subterraneous*;<sup>8</sup> and, otherwise: but we will at present distinguish them into those things that respect the heavens, or concern the air, the water, or the earth.

1. To the first sort of particulars belong the longitude and latitude of the place (that being of moment<sup>9</sup> in reference to observations about the air etc.) and consequently the length of the longest and shortest days and nights, the climate, parallels etc., what fixed stars are and what not seen there:

what constellations 'tis said to be subject to? Whereunto may be added other astrological matters, if they be thought worth mentioning.

2. About the air may be observed its temperature, as to the first four qualities (commonly so called)<sup>1</sup> and the measures of them: its weight, clearness, refractive power: its subtlety or grossness: its abounding with or wanting an esurine<sup>2</sup> salt: its variations according to the seasons of the year, and the times of the day; what duration the several kinds of weather usually have: what meteors it is most or least wont to breed; and in what order they are generated; and how long they usually last: especially what winds it is subject to; whether any of them be stated and ordinary, etc. What diseases are epidemical that are supposed<sup>3</sup> to flow from the air: what other diseases, wherein that hath a share, the country is subject to; the plague and contagious sickness: what is the usual salubrity or insalubrity of the air; and with what constitutions<sup>4</sup> it agrees better or worse than others.
3. About the water may be observed, the sea, its depth, degree of saltness, tides, currents, etc. Next, rivers, their bigness, length, course, inundations, goodness, levity<sup>5</sup> (or their contraries) of waters, etc. Then, lakes, ponds, springs, and especially mineral waters, their kinds, qualities, virtues, and how examined. To the waters belong also fishes, what kinds of them (whether salt or fresh-water fish) are to be found in the country; their store, bigness, goodness, seasons, haunts, peculiarities of any kind, and the ways of taking them, especially those that are not purely mechanical.<sup>6</sup>
4. In the earth may be observed
  1. Itself.
  2. Its inhabitants and its productions, and these external and internal.

First, in the earth itself may be observed, its dimensions, situation, east, west, north, and south: its figure, its plains and

valleys, and their extents, its hills and mountains, and the height of the tallest, both in reference to the neighboring valleys or plains, and in reference to the level of the seas: as also, whether the mountains lie scattered or in ridges, and whether those run north and south or east and west, etc. What promontories,<sup>7</sup> fiery or smoking hills, &c the country has, or hath not: whether the country be coherent, or much broken into islands. What the magnetical declination<sup>8</sup> is in several places, and the variations of that declination in the same place (and, if either of those be very considerable, then what circumstances may assist one to guess at the reason, as subterranean<sup>9</sup> fires, the vicinity of iron-mines &c.), what the nature of the soil is, whether clays, sandy, etc. or good mold; and what grains, fruits, and other vegetables do the most naturally agree with it: as also, by what particular arts and industries the inhabitants improve the advantages and remedy the inconveniences of their soil: what hidden qualities the soil may have (as that of Ireland, against venomous beasts,<sup>1</sup> etc.).

Secondly, above the ignobler productions of the earth, there must be careful account given of the inhabitants themselves, both natives and strangers that have been long settled there: and in particular, their stature, shape, color, features, strength, agility, beauty (or the want of it), complexions, hair, diet, inclinations, and customs that seem not due to education. As to their women (beside the other things) may be observed their fruitfulness or barrenness; their hard or easy labor, etc. And both in women and men must be taken notice of what diseases they are subject to, and in these whether there be any symptom or any other circumstance that is unusual and remarkable.

As to the external productions of the earth, the inquiries may be such as these: what grasses, grains, herbs, (garden and wild) flowers, fruit-trees, timber-trees (especially any trees whose wood is considerable), coppices,<sup>2</sup> groves, woods, forests, etc. the country has or wants: what peculiarities are observable in any of them: what soils they most like or dislike; and with what culture<sup>3</sup> they thrive best. What animals the country has or wants, both as to wild beasts,

hawks, and other birds of prey; and as to poultry and cattle of all sorts, and particularly whether it have any animals that are not common, or anything that is peculiar in those that are so.

The internal productions or concealments of the earth are here understood to be the riches that lie hid under the ground and are not already referred to other inquiries.

Among these subterranean observations may be taken notice of, what sorts of minerals of any kind they want, as well as what they have; then, what quarries the country affords and the particular conditions both of the quarries and the stones: as also, how the beds of stone lie, in reference to north and south etc. What clays and earths it affords, as tobacco-pipe-clay, marls, fuller's earths, earths for potter's wares, boluses and other medicated earths;<sup>4</sup> what other minerals it yields, as coals, salt-mines, or salt-springs, alum, vitriol, sulphur, etc. What metals the country yields, and a description of the mines, their number, situation, depth, signs, waters, damp, quantities of ore, goodness of ore, extraneous things and ways of reducing their ores into metals, etc.

To these general articles of inquiries (sayeth their proposer)<sup>5</sup> should be added; 1. Inquiries about traditions concerning all particular things relating to that country, as either peculiar to it or at least uncommon elsewhere. 2. Inquiries that require learning or skill in the answerer: to which should be subjoined proposals of ways to enable men to give answers to these more difficult inquiries.

Thus far our author, who, as he has been pleased to impart these general (but yet very comprehensive and greatly directive<sup>6</sup>) articles; so, 'tis hoped from his own late intimation, that he will shortly enlarge them with particular and subordinate ones. These, in the meantime, were thought fit to be published, that the inquisitive and curious might, by such an assistance, be invited not to delay their searches or matters that are so highly conducive to the improvement of true philosophy and the welfare of mankind.



- Note 1: The “Heads” appeared in *Philosophical Transactions* 11 (April 2, 1666).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:  
The reference to *Philosophical Transactions* 8 is to an article featuring “Directions for Sea-Men, bound for far Voyages,” another proposal for information collection. “Directions” is explicit about how the Royal Society could “increase their philosophical stock by the advantage, which England enjoys of making voyages into all parts of the world,” English “Sea-men going into the East & West Indies” (India and the Caribbean, sites of colonial activity). Note that the article opens in the voice of Royal Society secretary Henry Oldenburg, before turning to Boyle’s “heads.”  
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Topics or categories to organize research and discourse but also to direct information collection.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Boyle.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The first volume of Boyle’s *Some Considerations Touching the Usefulness of Experimental Natural Philosophy* was published in 1663; a second volume appeared in 1671.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Boyle (“the proposer”) recognizes that some of the general heads, or categories, have a very large scope in themselves.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, Boyle has drawn up lists of particular questions about “subordinate subjects” under each general category, some of the lists almost as long as what is given here. Boyle’s “Other Inquiries concerning the Sea” and “Articles of Inquiries touching Mines” later appeared in the *Transactions*, which also published lists by other authors focused on specific places—like Surat, in India.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: *Terra* is Latin for land, the surface of the earth. Boyle suggests that he might organize his inquiry with spatial categories: about things “above the earth,” “of the earth,” and “below the surface of the earth.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Significant.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: In his later “Suspensions about Some Hidden Qualities in the Air,” Boyle draws on Aristotelian tradition when referring to “the four first qualities of the air (heat, cold, dryness and moisture).”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Corrosive. “Wanting”: lacking.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Thought.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Different physical natures of human bodies. “Salubrity”: conduciveness to health.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Lightness.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Boyle urges attention to not just natural phenomena but also the knowledge and skills of the people in a place—here, techniques for catching fish. “Their store”: the supply of them.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Headlands, or high points near water.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Position of the magnetic compass needle.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Underground.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Snakes, especially.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Composed of small trees and underwood.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Practices of cultivation.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Boyle lists different kinds of soils, with some attention to possible uses. Fuller’s earth, for example, is the clay used by a fuller to clean cloth.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Boyle. Oldenburg’s voice now takes over again.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “Informing; shewing the way” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)

## JOSEPH ADDISON

In his periodical writing in the *Tatler* and *Spectator* (see [p. 281](#)), Joseph Addison celebrated science and satirized it, thus offering a rich example of a thoughtful contemporary engaging with new intellectual currents. As his writings show, science could seem closely intertwined both with the noblest speculations of religion and with an extremely mockable form of obsessive collecting. As a university student, Addison offered a Latin oration praising Descartes' challenge to Aristotelianism, and later he helped arrange an influential series of London coffeehouse lectures on astronomy by Newton's chosen successor, the eccentric William Whiston. In *Spectator* 519, Addison articulated some of the excitement and importance he found in new scientific discoveries. But he also satirized certain kinds and uses of science. In *Tatler* 216, he repurposed the figure of Nicholas Gimcrack, the ridiculous experimenter skewered in Thomas Shadwell's 1676 play *The Virtuoso*. In the play, Gimcrack loses money and relationships in pursuit of a completely useless and trivial brand of science: he boasts, for instance, that he has spent "whole days and nights" studying "a small black speck" stuck to the "anus" of an ant inside an egg. (Many contemporaries assumed Shadwell was mocking Robert Hooke.) Decades later, Addison extends this satire by imagining Gimcrack's will—a document suggesting that science's focus on small things might lead to a failure to value things and people properly.

# [On Useless Science]

**The Tatler 216, August 24–26, 1710**

*Nugis addere pondus*<sup>1</sup> HORACE, *Epistles* 1.19.42

From my own apartment, August 25.

Nature is full of wonders; every atom is a standing miracle, and endowed with such qualities as could not be impressed on it by a power and wisdom less than infinite. For this reason I would not discourage any searches that are made into the most minute and trivial parts of the creation. However, since the world abounds in the noblest fields of speculation, it is, methinks, the mark of a little genius to be wholly conversant among insects, reptiles, animalcules, and these trifling rarities that furnish out the apartment of a Virtuoso.<sup>2</sup>

There are some men whose heads are so oddly turned this way, that though they are utter strangers to the common occurrences of life, they are able to discover the sex of a cockle, or describe the generation of a mite in all its circumstances. They are so little versed in the world, that they scarce know a horse from an ox; but at the same time will tell you with a great deal of gravity, that a flea is a rhinoceros, and a snail an hermaphrodite. I have known one of these whimsical philosophers who has set a greater value upon a collection of spiders than he would upon a flock of sheep, and has sold his coat off his back to purchase a tarantula.

I would not have a scholar wholly unacquainted with these secrets and curiosities of nature; but certainly the mind of man, that is capable of so much higher contemplations, should not be altogether fixed upon such mean<sup>3</sup> and disproportioned objects. Observations of this kind are apt to alienate us too much from the knowledge of the world, and to make us serious upon trifles, by which means they expose philosophy to the ridicule of the witty, and

contempt of the ignorant. In short, studies of this nature should be the diversions, relaxations and amusements, not the care, business, and concern of life.

It is indeed wonderful<sup>4</sup> to consider that there should be a sort of learned men who are wholly employed in gathering together the refuse of nature, if I may call it so, and hoarding up in their chests and cabinets such creatures as others industriously avoid the sight of. One does not know how to mention some of the most precious parts of their treasure, without a kind of an apology for it. I have been shewn a beetle valued at 20 crowns,<sup>5</sup> and a toad at an hundred. But we must take this for a general rule, that whatever appears trivial or obscene in the common notions of the world looks grave and philosophical in the eye of a Virtuoso.

To show this humor in its perfection, I shall present my reader with the legacy of a certain Virtuoso, who laid out a considerable estate<sup>6</sup> in natural rarities and curiosities, which upon his deathbed he bequeathed to his relations and friends in the following words:

*The will of a virtuoso.*

I Nicholas Gimcrack<sup>7</sup> being in sound health of mind, but in great weakness of body, do by this my last will and testament bestow my worldly goods and chattels in manner following:

Imprimis,<sup>8</sup> To my dear wife,

One box of butterflies,<sup>9</sup>

One drawer of shells,

A female skeleton,

A dried cockatrice.<sup>1</sup>

Item, To my daughter Elizabeth, my receipt for preserving dead caterpillars; as also my preparations of winter may-dew and embryo pickle.<sup>2</sup>

Item, To my little daughter Fanny,

Three crocodile's eggs.

And upon the birth of her first child, if she marries with her  
mother's consent,

The nest of an hummingbird.

Item, To my eldest brother, as an acknowledgment for the lands  
he has vested in<sup>3</sup> my son Charles, I bequeath

My last year's collection of grasshoppers.

Item, To his daughter Susanna, being his only child, I bequeath  
my

English weeds pasted on royal paper.

With my large folio<sup>4</sup> of Indian cabbage.

Item, To my learned and worthy friend Dr. Johannes Elscrickius,  
professor in anatomy, and my associate in the studies of nature, as  
an eternal monument of my affection and friendship for him, I  
bequeath

My rat's testicles, and

Whale's pizzle,<sup>5</sup>

To him and his issue-male,<sup>6</sup> and in default of such issue in the said  
Dr. Elscrickius, then to return to my executor and his heirs for ever.

Having fully provided for my nephew Isaac, by making over to  
him some years since

A horned scarabaeus<sup>7</sup>

The skin of a rattle-snake, and

The mummy of an Egyptian king,

I make no further provision for him in this my will.

My eldest son John having spoken disrespectfully of his little  
sister whom I keep by me in spirits of wine,<sup>8</sup> and in many other  
instances behaved himself undutifully towards me, I do disinherit  
and wholly cut off from any part of this my personal estate, by  
giving him a single cockle shell.

To my second son Charles I give and bequeath all my flowers, plants, minerals, mosses, shells, pebbles, fossils, beetles, butterflies, caterpillars, grasshoppers, and vermin not above specified; as also all my monsters,<sup>9</sup> both wet and dry, making the said Charles whole and sole executor of this my last will and testament; he paying or causing to be paid the aforesaid legacies within the space of six months after my decease. And I do hereby revoke all other wills whatsoever by me formerly made.

## Endnotes

1710

- Note 1: To add weight to trifles (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A word closely associated with learned scientific practitioners and collectors. It was used positively—Boyle published a book entitled *The Christian Virtuoso*—but also more disparagingly, implying triviality. “Animalcules”: very small or microscopic creatures.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Low, inferior.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Inciting wonder (used sarcastically).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Equivalent to £5, an outrageously high sum.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Spent a considerable amount of his estate’s money.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The character borrowed from Shadwell’s play. A gimcrack, as a noun, is a bauble or trifle.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In the first place.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: *Tatler* 221 features a letter from Gimcrack’s widow, who explains that he eventually died from a fever caused by the “violent exercise” of chasing a rare butterfly.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A mythical reptile (but the word was also used as a derogatory term for a woman).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A solution to pickle, or preserve, dead embryos. “Receipt”: recipe.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Given possession of to.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A big book.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Penis.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Male sons.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Beetle.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Spirits of wine used as a preservative (an “embryo pickle” for his dead “little sister”). In a 1666 essay in the *Philosophical Transactions*, Boyle endorsed these spirits as “A way of preserving birds taken out of the egg and other small fetuses.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Strange or unusually formed creatures. The *Philosophical Transactions* often featured “monsters” and “monstrous births.”[Return to reference 9](#)



# [On the Scale of Being]

**The Spectator 519, October 25, 1712**

*Inde hominum pecudumque genus, vitaeque  
volantum,  
Et quae marmoreo fert monstra sub aequore  
pontus.*<sup>1</sup>

—VIRGIL, *Aeneid* 6.728–29

Though there is a great deal of pleasure in contemplating the material world, by which I mean that system of bodies into which nature has so curiously wrought the mass of dead matter, with the several relations which those bodies bear to one another, there is still, methinks, something more wonderful and surprising in contemplations on the world of life, by which I mean all those animals with which every part of the universe is furnished. The material world is only the shell of the universe: the world of life are its inhabitants.

If we consider those parts of the material world which lie the nearest to us and are, therefore, subject to our observations and inquiries, it is amazing to consider the infinity of animals with which it is stocked. Every part of matter is peopled. Every green leaf swarms with inhabitants. There is scarce a single humor in the body of a man, or of any other animal, in which our glasses<sup>2</sup> do not discover myriads of living creatures. The surface of animals is also covered with other animals which are, in the same manner, the basis of other animals that live upon it; nay, we find in the most solid bodies, as in marble itself, innumerable cells and cavities that are crowded with such imperceptible inhabitants as are too little for the naked eye to discover. On the other hand, if we look into the more bulky parts of nature, we see the seas, lakes, and rivers teeming

with numberless kinds of living creatures. We find every mountain and marsh, wilderness and wood, plentifully stocked with birds and beasts, and every part of matter affording proper necessities and conveniences for the livelihood of multitudes which inhabit it.

The author of *The Plurality of Worlds*<sup>3</sup> draws a very good argument upon this consideration for the peopling of every planet, as indeed it seems very probable from the analogy of reason that, if no part of matter which we are acquainted with lies waste and useless, those great bodies, which are at such a distance from us, should not be desert and unpeopled, but rather that they should be furnished with beings adapted to their respective situations.

Existence is a blessing to those beings only which are endowed with perception and is, in a manner, thrown away upon dead matter any further than as it is subservient to beings which are conscious of their existence. Accordingly, we find from the bodies which lie under our observation that matter is only made as the basis and support of animals and that there is no more of the one than what is necessary for the existence of the other.

Infinite Goodness is of so communicative a nature that it seems to delight in the conferring of existence upon every degree of perceptive being. As this is a speculation which I have often pursued with great pleasure to myself, I shall enlarge farther upon it, by considering that part of the scale of beings which comes within our knowledge.

There are some living creatures which are raised but just above dead matter. To mention only that species of shellfish, which are formed in the fashion of a cone, that grow to the surface of several rocks and immediately die upon their being severed from the place where they grow. There are many other creatures but one remove from these, which have no other sense besides that of feeling and taste. Others have still an additional one of hearing; others of smell, and others of sight. It is wonderful to observe by what a gradual progress the world of life advances through a prodigious variety of species before a creature is formed that is complete in all its senses; and, even among these, there is such a different degree of

perfection in the sense which one animal enjoys, beyond what appears in another, that, though the sense in different animals be distinguished by the same common denomination, it seems almost of a different nature. If after this we look into the several inward perfections of cunning and sagacity, or what we generally call instinct, we find them rising after the same manner, imperceptibly, one above another, and receiving additional improvements, according to the species in which they are implanted. This progress in nature is so very gradual that the most perfect of an inferior species comes very near to the most imperfect of that which is immediately above it.

The exuberant and overflowing goodness of the Supreme Being, whose mercy extends to all his works, is plainly seen, as I have before hinted, from his having made so very little matter, at least what falls within our knowledge, that does not swarm with life. Nor is his goodness less seen in the diversity than in the multitude of living creatures. Had he only made one species of animals, none of the rest would have enjoyed the happiness of existence; he has, therefore, *specified* in his creation every degree of life, every capacity of being. The whole chasm in nature, from a plant to a man, is filled up with diverse kinds of creatures, rising one over another by such a gentle and easy ascent that the little transitions and deviations from one species to another are almost insensible. This intermediate space is so well husbanded and managed that there is scarce a degree of perception which does not appear in some one part of the world of life. Is the goodness or wisdom of the Divine Being more manifested in this his proceeding?

There is a consequence, besides those I have already mentioned, which seems very naturally deducible from the foregoing considerations. If the scale of being rises by such a regular progress so high as man, we may by a parity of reason<sup>4</sup> suppose that it still proceeds gradually through those beings which are of a superior nature to him, since there is an infinitely greater space and room for different degrees of perfection between the Supreme Being and man than between man and the most despicable insect. This

consequence of so great a variety of beings which are superior to us, from that variety which is inferior to us, is made by Mr. Locke<sup>5</sup> in a passage which I shall here set down after having premised that, notwithstanding there is such infinite room between man and his Maker for the creative power to exert itself in, it is impossible that it should ever be filled up, since there will be still an infinite gap or distance between the highest created being and the Power which produced him:

That there should be more species of intelligent creatures above us than there are of sensible and material below, is probable to me from hence: That in all the visible corporeal world we see no chasms or no gaps. All quite down from us, the descent is by easy steps and a continued series of things that, in each remove, differ very little from the other. There are fishes that have wings and are not strangers to the airy region; and there are some birds that are inhabitants of the water, whose blood is cold as fishes and their flesh so like in taste that the scrupulous are allowed them on fish days.<sup>6</sup> There are animals so near of kin both to birds and beasts that they are in the middle between both: amphibious animals link the terrestrial and aquatic together; seals live at land and at sea, and porpoises have the warm blood and entrails of a hog, not to mention what is confidently reported of mermaids or seamen. There are some brutes that seem to have as much knowledge and reason as some that are called men; and the animal and vegetable kingdoms are so nearly joined that, if you will take the lowest of one and the highest of the other, there will scarce be perceived any great difference between them; and so on, till we come to the lowest and the most inorganic parts of matter, we shall find everywhere that the several species are linked together and differ but in almost insensible degrees. And when we consider the infinite power and wisdom of the Maker, we

have reason to think that it is suitable to the magnificent harmony of the universe and the great design and infinite goodness of the Architect, that the species of creatures should also, by gentle degrees, ascend upward from us toward his infinite perfection, as we see they gradually descend from us downward; which, if it be probable, we have reason to be persuaded that there are far more species of creatures above us than there are beneath, we being in degrees of perfection much more remote from the infinite being of God than we are from the lowest state of being and that which approaches nearest to nothing. And yet of all those distinct species we have no clear distinct ideas.

In this system of being, there is no creature so wonderful in its nature, and which so much deserves our particular attention, as man, who fills up the middle space between the animal and intellectual nature, the visible and invisible world, and is that link in the chain of beings which has been often termed the *nexus utriusque mundi*.<sup>7</sup> So that he who, in one respect, is associated with angels and archangels, may look upon a Being of infinite perfection as his father, and the highest order of spirits as his brethren, may, in another respect, say to corruption, "Thou art my father," and to the worm, "Thou art my mother and my sister."<sup>8</sup>

## Endnotes

1712

- Note 1: Thence the race of men and beasts, the lives of flying creatures, and the monsters that ocean bears beneath her smooth surface (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Microscopes. "Humor": fluid.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Bernard de Fontenelle (1657–1757). This popular book, a series of dialogues between a scientist and a countess concerning the possibility of other inhabited planets and the new astrophysics in general, was published in 1686 in France

and was translated in 1688 by both John Glanvill and Aphra Behn.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: A reasonable analogy or equivalence.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Locke, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 3.6.12 (see above).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Days of religious observance when fish instead of meat is eaten.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The binding together of both worlds (Latin).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Job 17:14.[Return to reference 8](#)

# **JOHN WILMOT, SECOND EARL OF ROCHESTER 1647–1680**

John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, was the precocious son of one of Charles II's most loyal followers in exile. He won the king's favor at the Restoration and, in 1664, after education at Oxford and on the Continent, took a place at court, at the age of seventeen. There he soon distinguished himself as "the man who has the most wit and the least honor in England." When he was eighteen, he abducted Elizabeth Malet, an heiress, seemingly with an intent to force her to marry him. The crime outraged many, including the king, who imprisoned Rochester in the Tower of London. But he regained his position by courageous service in the naval war against the Dutch, and in 1667 he married Malet. The rest of his career was no less stormy. His satiric wit, directed not only at ordinary mortals but at Dryden and Charles II himself, embroiled him in constant quarrels and exiles; his practical jokes, his affairs, and his sinful ways were legendary. He circulated his works, always intellectually daring and often obscene, to a limited court readership in manuscripts executed by professional scribes—a common way of handling writing deemed too ideologically or morally scandalous for print. An early printed collection of his poems did appear in 1680, though the title page read "Antwerp," probably to hide its London origin. The air of scandal and disguise surrounding his writing only

intensified his notoriety as the exemplar of the dissolute, libertine ways of court culture. He told his biographer, Gilbert Burnet, that “for five years together he was continually drunk.” His deathbed was also a dramatic scene of performance, and for posterity Rochester became a favorite moral topic: the libertine who had seen the error of his ways and converted to Christian repentance.

*Wit*, in the Restoration, meant not only a clever turn of phrase but mental capacity and intellectual power. Rochester was famous for both kinds of wit. His fierce intelligence, impatient of sham and convention, helped design a way of life based on style, cleverness, and self-interest—a way of life observable in Restoration plays (Dorimant, in Etherege’s *The Man of Mode*, strongly resembles Rochester). Stylistically, Rochester infuses forms such as the heroic couplet with a volatility that contrasts with the pointed and balanced manner of its other masters. From the very first line of “A Satire against Reason and Mankind”—“Were I who to my cost already am”—he plunges the reader into a couplet mode energized by speculation, self-interruption, and enjambment; and he frequently employs extravagant effects (such as the alliterations “love’s lesser lightning” and “balmy brinks of bliss” in “The Imperfect Enjoyment”) to flaunt his delight in dramatizing situations, sensations, and himself. “The Disabled Debauchee,” composed in “heroic stanzas” like those of Dryden’s *Annus Mirabilis*, subverts the very notion of heroism by turning conventions upside down. Philosophically, Rochester is daring and destabilizing. In “A Satire,” he rejects high-flown, theoretical reason and consigns its “misguided follower” to an abyss of doubt. And his love lyrics use libertine postures to press at the conventions of the poetic form. Rochester everywhere discovers his poetic voice through opposition and critique, and even seems to enjoy turning such critical energies against himself.



## The Disabled Debauchee

As some brave admiral, in former war  
Deprived of force, but pressed with courage still,  
Two rival fleets appearing from afar,  
Crawls to the top of an adjacent hill;

5 From whence, with thoughts full of concern, he  
views

The wise and daring conduct of the fight,  
And each bold action to his mind renews  
His present glory and his past delight;

10 From his fierce eyes flashes of fire he throws,  
As from black clouds when lightning breaks  
away;

Transported, thinks himself amidst his foes,  
And absent, yet enjoys the bloody day;

15 So, when my days of impotence approach,  
And I'm by pox<sup>o</sup> and wine's unlucky chance  
Forced from the pleasing billows of debauch  
On the dull shore of lazy temperance,

20 My pains at least some respite shall afford  
While I behold the battles you maintain  
When fleets of glasses sail about the board,<sup>o</sup>  
From whose broadsides<sup>1</sup> volleys of wit shall rain.

Nor shall the sight of honorable scars,  
Which my too forward valor did procure,  
Frighten new-listed<sup>o</sup> soldiers from the wars:  
Past joys have more than paid what I endure.

25       Should any youth (worth being drunk) prove nice,<sup>o</sup>  
           And from his fair inviter meanly shrink,  
       'Twill please the ghost of my departed vice  
           If, at my counsel, he repent and drink.

30       Or should some cold-complexioned sot forbid,  
           With his dull morals, our bold night-alarms,  
       I'll fire his blood by telling what I did  
           When I was strong and able to bear arms.

35       I'll tell of whores attacked, their lords at home;  
           Bawds' quarters beaten up, and fortress won;  
       Windows demolished, watches<sup>o</sup> overcome;  
           And handsome ills by my contrivance done.

40       Nor shall our love-fits, Chloris, be forgot,  
           When each the well-looking linkboy<sup>2</sup> strove t'  
           enjoy,  
       And the best kiss was the deciding lot  
           Whether the boy used<sup>3</sup> you, or I the boy.

      With tales like these I will such thoughts inspire  
           As to important mischief shall incline:  
       I'll make him long some ancient church to fire,  
           And fear no lewdness he's called to by wine.

45       Thus, statesmanlike, I'll saucily impose,  
           And safe from action, valiantly advise;  
       Sheltered in impotence, urge you to blows,  
           And being good for nothing else, be wise.

## Endnotes

1680

- Note 1: The sides of the table; artillery on a ship; sheets on which satirical verses were printed.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Good-looking boy employed to light the way with a link or torch.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The meaning of “used,” which appears in the first printed version and many manuscript versions, includes but extends beyond that of “fucked,” another prevalent alternative and one preferred by most modern editors.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *syphilis*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *table*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *newly enlisted*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *coy, fastidious*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *watchmen*[Return to reference °](#)

# The Imperfect Enjoyment<sup>1</sup>

Naked she lay, clasped in my longing arms,  
I filled with love, and she all over charms;  
Both equally inspired with eager fire,  
Melting through kindness, flaming in desire.  
5 With arms, legs, lips close clinging to embrace,  
She clips<sup>o</sup> me to her breast, and sucks me to her  
face.  
Her nimble tongue, Love's lesser lightning, played  
Within my mouth, and to my thoughts conveyed  
Swift orders that I should prepare to throw  
10 The all-dissolving thunderbolt below.  
My fluttering soul, sprung<sup>2</sup> with the pointed kiss,  
Hangs hovering o'er her balmy brinks of bliss.  
But whilst her busy hand would guide that part  
Which should convey my soul up to her heart,  
15 In liquid raptures I dissolve all o'er,  
Melt into sperm, and spend at every pore.  
A touch from any part of her had done 't:  
Her hand, her foot, her very look's a cunt.  
Smiling, she chides in a kind murmuring noise,  
And from her body wipes the clammy joys,  
20 When, with a thousand kisses wandering o'er  
My panting bosom, "Is there then no more?"  
She cries. "All this to love and rapture's due;  
Must we not pay a debt to pleasure too?"  
But I, the most forlorn, lost man alive,  
25 To show my wished obedience vainly strive:  
I sigh, alas! and kiss, but cannot swive.<sup>o</sup>  
Eager desires confound my first intent,  
Succeeding shame does more success prevent,

30 And rage at last confirms me impotent.  
 Ev'n her fair hand, which might bid heat  
 return  
 To frozen age, and make cold hermits burn,  
 Applied to my dead cinder, warms no more  
 Than fire to ashes could past flames restore.  
 Trembling, confused, despairing, limber, dry,  
 35 A wishing, weak, unmoving lump I lie.  
 This dart of love, whose piercing point, oft tried,  
 With virgin blood ten thousand maids have dyed;  
 Which nature still directed with such art  
 That it through every cunt reached every heart—  
 40 Stiffly resolved, 'twould carelessly invade  
 Woman or man, nor aught<sup>o</sup> its fury stayed:  
 Where'er it pierced, a cunt it found or made  
 —  
 Now languid lies in this unhappy hour,  
 Shrunk up and sapless like a withered flower.  
 45 Thou treacherous, base deserter of my flame,  
 False to my passion, fatal to my fame,  
 Through what mistaken magic dost thou prove  
 So true to lewdness, so untrue to love?  
 What oyster-cinder-beggar-common whore  
 50 Didst thou e'er fail in all thy life before?  
 When vice, disease, and scandal lead the way,  
 With what officious haste dost thou obey!  
 Like a rude, roaring hector<sup>o</sup> in the streets  
 Who scuffles, cuffs, and justles all he meets,  
 55 But if his King or country claim his aid,  
 The rakehell villain shrinks and hides his head;  
 Ev'n so thy brutal valor is displayed, Breaks every  
 stew,<sup>3</sup> does each small whore invade,  
 But when great Love the onset does command,  
 60 Base recreant to thy prince, thou dar'st not stand.  
 Worst part of me, and henceforth hated most,

Through all the town a common fucking post,  
 On whom each whore relieves her tingling cunt  
 As hogs on gates do rub themselves and grunt,  
 65      Mayst thou to ravenous chancres be a prey,  
 Or in consuming weepings<sup>4</sup> waste away;  
 May strangury and stone<sup>5</sup> thy days attend;  
 May'st thou ne'er piss, who didst refuse to spend  
 70      When all my joys did on false thee depend.  
             And may ten thousand abler pricks agree  
             To do the wronged Corinna right for thee.

## Endnotes

1680

- Note 1: The genre of poems about the downfall of male "pride"—not only a swelled head but an erection—derives from Ovid's *Amores* 3.7. For a woman's treatment of this situation, see Aphra Behn's "The Disappointment" (p. 148). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Startled from cover, like a game bird. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Breaks into every brothel. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Chancres" and "weepings" are signs of venereal disease. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Strangury" and "stone" cause slow and painful urination. [Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *hugs* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *screw* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *anything* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bully* [Return to reference °](#)

# Upon Nothing

Nothing, thou elder brother even to shade,  
Thou hadst a being ere the world was made  
And (well fixed) art alone of ending not afraid.

5 Ere time and place were, time and place were not,  
When primitive Nothing Something straight begot,  
Then all proceeded from the great united *What*.

Something, the general attribute of all,  
Severed from thee, its sole original,  
Into thy boundless self must undistinguished fall.

10 Yet Something did thy mighty power command  
And from thy fruitful emptiness's hand  
Snatched men, beasts, birds, fire, water, air, and  
land.

Matter, the wick'dst offspring of thy race,  
By form assisted, flew from thy embrace,  
And rebel light obscured thy reverend dusky face.

15 With form and matter, time and place did join,  
Body thy foe, with these did leagues combine<sup>1</sup>  
To spoil thy peaceful realm and ruin all thy line.

But turncoat time assists the foe in vain  
And bribed by thee destroys their short-lived reign  
20 And to thy hungry womb drives back thy slaves  
again.

Though mysteries are barred from laic eyes<sup>2</sup>  
And the divine alone with warrant pries

Into thy bosom where thy truth in private lies,  
 25 Yet this of thee the wise may truly say:  
 Thou from the virtuous, nothing tak'st away,<sup>3</sup>  
 And to be part of thee, the wicked wisely pray.  
  
 Great negative, how vainly would the wise  
 Enquire, define, distinguish, teach, devise,  
 30 Didst thou not stand to point<sup>o</sup> their blind  
 philosophies.  
  
 Is or Is Not, the two great ends of fate,  
 And true or false, the subject of debate  
 That perfect or destroy the vast designs of state,  
  
 When they have racked the politician's breast,  
 Within thy bosom most securely rest  
 35 And when reduced to thee are least unsafe and best.  
  
 But Nothing, why does Something still permit  
 That sacred monarchs should at council sit  
 With persons highly thought, at best, for nothing fit;  
  
 40 Whilst weighty Something modestly abstains  
 From princes' coffers<sup>4</sup> and from statesmen's brains  
 And Nothing there like stately Something reigns?  
  
 Nothing, who dwellst with fools in grave disguise,  
 For whom they reverend shapes and forms devise,  
 45 Lawn-sleeves and furs and gowns,<sup>5</sup> when they like  
 thee look wise;  
  
 French truth, Dutch prowess, British policy,  
 Hibernian<sup>o</sup> learning, Scotch civility,  
 Spaniards' dispatch, Danes' wit<sup>6</sup> are mainly seen in  
 thee;



The great man's gratitude to his best friend,  
 Kings' promises, whores' vows, towards thee they  
 bend,  
 Flow swiftly into thee and in thee ever end.

## Endnotes

1679

- Note 1: Form, matter, time, and place combined in alliances against Nothing. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the eyes of the laity, who are uninitiated in Nothing's mysteries. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: You, Nothing, do not take anything away from the virtuous. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Charles II's coffers were notably empty, and he was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1672. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Worn by judges. "Lawn": a fine linen or cotton fabric, worn by bishops. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: All proverbial deficiencies of the various nationalities mentioned, many of them exposed during the Anglo-Dutch war (1672–74). [Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *expose* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Irish* [Return to reference °](#)

## A Satire against Reason and Mankind<sup>1</sup>

Were I (who to my cost already am  
One of those strange prodigious creatures, man)  
A spirit free to choose, for my own share,  
What case of flesh and blood I pleased to  
wear,  
5 I'd be a dog, a monkey, or a bear;  
Or anything but that vain animal  
Who is so proud of being rational.  
The senses are too gross, and he'll contrive  
A sixth<sup>2</sup> to contradict the other five:  
And before certain instinct will prefer  
10 Reason, which fifty times for one does err.  
Reason, an ignis fatuus<sup>3</sup> of the mind,  
Which leaving light of nature, sense, behind,  
Pathless and dangerous wandering ways it takes,  
Through Error's fenny bogs and thorny brakes:<sup>o</sup>  
15 Whilst the misguided follower climbs with pain  
Mountains of whimsies heaped in his own brain;  
Stumbling from thought to thought, falls headlong  
down  
Into doubt's boundless sea, where like<sup>o</sup> to drown,  
Books bear him up awhile, and make him try  
20 To swim with bladders<sup>4</sup> of philosophy;  
In hopes still to o'ertake th'escaping light,  
The vapor dances in his dazzled sight,  
Till spent, it leaves him to eternal night.  
Then old age and experience, hand in hand,  
25 Lead him to death, and make him understand,  
After a search so painful and so long,  
That all his life he has been in the wrong.  
Huddled in dirt the reasoning engine<sup>o</sup> lies,

30 Who was so proud, so witty and so wise.  
Pride drew him in (as cheats their bubbles<sup>o</sup> catch)  
And made him venture to be made a wretch.  
His wisdom did his happiness destroy,  
Aiming to know that world he should enjoy;  
35 And wit was his vain frivolous pretence  
Of pleasing others at his own expense:  
For wits are treated just like common whores,  
First they're enjoyed and then kicked out of doors.  
The pleasure past, a threatening doubt remains,  
40 That frights th'enjoyer with succeeding pains:<sup>5</sup>  
Women and men of wit are dangerous tools,  
And ever fatal to admiring fools.  
Pleasure allures, and when the fops escape,  
'Tis not that they're beloved, but fortunate;  
45 And therefore what they fear, at heart they  
hate.<sup>6</sup>

But now methinks some formal band and beard<sup>7</sup>  
Takes me to task. Come on, Sir, I'm prepared:  
"Then by your favor any thing that's writ  
Against this gibing,<sup>o</sup> jingling knack called wit,  
Likes<sup>o</sup> me abundantly, but you take care  
50 Upon this point not to be too severe.  
Perhaps my Muse were fitter for this part,  
For I profess I can be very smart  
On wit, which I abhor with all my heart.  
I long to lash it in some sharp essay,  
55 But your grand indiscretion bids me  
stay,  
And turns my tide of ink another way.  
What rage ferments in your degenerate mind,



Jacob Huysmans, ***Lord Rochester with a Monkey and a Book***, 1665–70. Rochester bestowing a laurel wreath, symbol of poetic excellence, on a monkey, who holds a page torn from a book.

---

60 To make you rail at reason and mankind?  
Blest glorious man! to whom alone kind heaven  
An everlasting soul has freely given;  
Whom his creator took such care to make,  
That from himself he did the image take,  
And this fair frame<sup>o</sup> in shining reason dressed,  
65 To dignify his nature above beast.

Reason, by whose aspiring influence  
We take a flight beyond material sense;  
Dive into mysteries, then soaring pierce  
The flaming limits of the universe;  
70 Search heaven and hell, find out what's acted there,  
And give the world true grounds of hope and fear."<sup>8</sup>  
    Hold, mighty man, I cry, all this we know,  
From the pathetic pen of Ingelo,<sup>9</sup>  
From Patrick's *Pilgrim*, Sibbs'<sup>1</sup> soliloquies;  
And 'tis this very reason I despise;  
75 This supernatural gift, that makes a mite  
Think he's the image of the infinite,  
Comparing his short life, void of all rest,  
To the eternal and the ever blest;  
This busy puzzling stirrer-up of doubt,  
80 That frames deep mysteries, then finds them out;  
Filling with frantic crowds of thinking fools  
Those reverend Bedlams,<sup>0</sup> colleges and schools;  
Borne on whose wings each heavy sot can pierce  
The limits of the boundless universe;  
85 So charming ointments make an old witch fly,  
And bear a crippled carcass through the sky.  
'Tis this exalted power whose business lies  
In nonsense and impossibilities.  
This made a whimsical philosopher  
90 Before the spacious world his tub prefer.<sup>2</sup>  
And we have modern cloistered coxcombs, who  
Retire to think, 'cause they have naught to do:  
But thoughts are given for action's government,  
Where action ceases, thought's impertinent.  
95 Our sphere of action is life's happiness,  
And he who thinks beyond, thinks like an ass.  
Thus, whilst against false reasoning I inveigh,  
I own<sup>0</sup> right reason, which I would obey:  
That reason which distinguishes by sense,  
100 And gives us rules of good and ill from thence;

That bounds desires with a reforming will,  
 To keep them more in vigor, not to kill.  
 Your reason hinders, mine helps to enjoy,  
 Renewing appetites yours would destroy.  
 105 My reason is my friend, yours is a cheat,  
 Hunger calls out, my reason bids me eat;  
 Perversely, yours your appetites does mock:  
 They ask for food, that answers, "what's a clock?"<sup>o</sup>  
 This plain distinction, Sir, your doubt secures,<sup>o</sup>  
 110 'Tis not true reason I despise, but yours.  
         Thus I think reason righted, but for man,  
 I'll ne'er recant, defend him if you can.  
 For all his pride and his philosophy,  
 'Tis evident beasts are, in their degree,  
 115 As wise at least, and better far than he.        }  
 Those creatures are the wisest who attain  
 By surest means, the ends at which they aim.  
 If therefore Jowler<sup>3</sup> finds and kills his hares  
 Better than Meres<sup>4</sup> supplies committee chairs,  
 120 Though one's a statesman, th'other but a hound,  
 Jowler in justice would be wiser found.  
 You see how far man's wisdom here extends;  
 Look next if human nature makes amends;  
 Whose principles most generous are and just,  
 125 And to whose morals you would sooner trust.  
 Be judge yourself, I'll bring it to the test,  
 Which is the basest creature, man or beast.  
 Birds feed on birds, beasts on each other prey,  
 But savage man alone does man betray;  
 130 Pressed by necessity they kill for food,  
 Man undoes man to do himself no good.  
 With teeth and claws by nature armed, they hunt  
 Nature's allowance to supply their want.  
 But man with smiles, embraces, friendship, praise,  
 135 Inhumanly his fellow's life betrays;  
 With voluntary<sup>o</sup> pains works his distress,

Not through necessity, but wantonness.  
For hunger or for love they fight and tear,  
Whilst wretched man is still<sup>o</sup> in arms for fear;  
140 For fear he arms, and is of arms afraid,  
By fear to fear successively betrayed.  
Base fear! The source whence his best passion came,  
His boasted honor, and his dear bought fame;  
That lust of power to which he's such a slave,  
145 And for the which alone he dares be brave,  
To which his various projects are designed,  
Which makes him generous, affable, and kind;  
For which he takes such pains to be thought wise  
And screws his actions in a forced disguise;  
150 Leading a tedious life in misery  
Under laborious mean hypocrisy.  
Look to the bottom of his vast design,  
Wherein man's wisdom, power, and glory join;  
The good he acts, the ill he does endure,  
155 'Tis all from fear to make himself secure.  
Merely for safety after fame we thirst,  
For all men would be cowards if they durst.  
And honesty's against all common sense;  
Men must be knaves, 'tis in their own defense.  
160 Mankind's dishonest, if you think it fair  
Amongst known cheats to play upon the square,<sup>o</sup>  
You'll be undone—  
Nor can weak truth your reputation save;  
The knaves will all agree to call you knave.  
165 Wronged shall he live, insulted o'er, oppressed,  
Who dares be less a villain than the rest.  
Thus Sir, you see what human nature craves:  
Most men are cowards, all men should be knaves.  
The difference lies, as far as I can see,  
170 Not in the thing itself, but the degree,  
And all the subject matter of debate  
Is only who's a knave of the first rate.

### **Addition<sup>5</sup>**

175 All this with indignation have I hurled  
At the pretending<sup>o</sup> part of the proud world,  
Who swollen with selfish vanity, devise  
False freedoms, holy cheats, and formal lies,  
Over their fellow slaves to tyrannize. }

180 But if in court so just a man there be  
(In court a just man yet unknown to me),  
Who does his needful flattery direct,  
Not to oppress and ruin, but protect  
(Since flattery, which way so ever laid,  
Is still a tax on that unhappy trade);<sup>6</sup>  
185 If so upright a statesman you can find,  
Whose passions bend to his unbiased mind;  
Who does his arts and policies apply  
To raise his country, not his family,  
Nor while his pride owned avarice withstands,  
Receives close bribes from friends' corrupted hands<sup>7</sup>—

190 Is there a churchman who on God relies,  
Whose life his faith and doctrine justifies?  
Not one blown up with vain prelati<sup>8</sup>c pride,  
Who for reproof of sins does man deride;  
Whose envious heart makes preaching a pretense,  
195 With his obstreperous saucy eloquence,  
To chide at kings, and rail at men of sense;  
Who from his pulpit vents more peevish lies,  
More bitter railings, scandals, calumnies, }

200 Than at a gossiping are thrown about  
When the good wives get drunk and then fall out;  
None of that sensual tribe, whose talents lie  
In avarice, pride, sloth and gluttony,  
Who hunt good livings,<sup>9</sup> but abhor good lives, }

205 Whose lust exalted to that height arrives,  
They act adultery with their own wives;<sup>1</sup> }

And ere a score of years completed be,



Can from the lofty pulpit proudly see  
 Half a large parish their own progeny.  
 Nor doating<sup>o</sup> bishop who would be adored  
 210 For domineering at the council board,<sup>2</sup>  
 A greater fop in business at fourscore,  
 Fonder of serious toys,<sup>o</sup> affected more  
 Than the gay glittering fool at twenty proves,  
 With all his noise, his tawdry clothes and loves;  
 215 But a meek humble man of honest sense,  
 Who, preaching peace, does practice continence;  
 Whose pious life's a proof he does believe  
 Mysterious truths, which no man can conceive;  
 If upon earth there dwell such God-like men,  
 220 I'll here recant my paradox<sup>3</sup> to them;  
 Adore those shrines of virtue, homage pay,  
 And with the rabble world, their laws obey.  
 If such there be, yet grant me this at least,  
 225 Man differs more from man, than man from beast.

## Endnotes

1679

- Note 1: Rochester's poem draws on a skeptical tradition emphasizing the weakness of human reason. For instance, Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), in his essay "An Apology for Raymond Sebond," had made much of the idea that animals are better equipped than humans to lead successful lives. In general, Rochester's poem loosely follows *Satire VIII* by the influential French poet and critic Nicolas Boileau (1636–1711), but Rochester—with his energetic intellect and embrace of paradox—makes these materials his own.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Here, reason.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Foolish fire (Latin). Sometimes called the will-o'-the-wisp, a light appearing in marshy lands that proverbially misleads travelers.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Inflated animal bladders used for buoyancy in the water.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The doubt that wits leave behind resembles venereal disease left by "common whores."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Though allured by wits, fops also fear and hate them.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Clergyman, wearing a clerical collar.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Teach the world about salvation and damnation.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Nathaniel Ingelo (d. 1683), author of the long religious allegory *Bentivolio and Urania* (1660).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Richard Sibbes, Puritan preacher who published volumes of sermons, though none called "soliloquies." Simon Patrick (1626–1707), author of the devotional work *The Parable of the Pilgrim* (1665).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Diogenes the Cynic (5th century B.C.E.), who lived in a tub to exemplify the virtues of asceticism.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A common name for hunting dogs.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sir Thomas Meres (1635–1715), a busy parliamentarian of the day.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The second part was also circulated as a separate poem.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Even good men must pay the tax of flattery if they "trade" at the royal court at Whitehall.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Nor while he proudly rejects open greed, still arranges that his friends collect secret bribes for him.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Of prelates, high church officials.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ecclesiastical appointments.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Married women of their parishes. Rochester also suggests that these clergymen act out their adulterous lusts with their own spouses.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In the Privy Council, a meeting of advisers to the monarch.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That beasts are superior to humans.[Return to reference 3](#)

# Notes

- °: *thickets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *likely*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *brain*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *dupes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *jeering*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Pleases*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *physical body*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *madhouses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *avow*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *what time is it?*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *resolves*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deliberate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *always*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *honestly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *affected*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *senile*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *trifles*[Return to reference](#) °

# Love and Life<sup>1</sup>

5 All my past life is mine no more,  
The flying hours are gone;  
Like transitory dreams giv'n o're  
Whose images are kept in store,  
By memory alone.

10 What ever is to come is not,  
How can it then be mine?<sup>2</sup>  
The present moment's all my lot,<sup>o</sup>  
And that as fast as it is got,  
Phillis is wholly thine.

15 Then talk not of inconstancy,  
False hearts and broken vows:  
If I by miracle can be  
This live-long minute true to thee,  
'Tis all that Heav'n allows.

## Endnotes

1680

- Note 1: Rochester playfully uses the conventional love lyric form to articulate more or less sexually exuberant libertine postures. Love lyrics often celebrate fidelity; Rochester reworks this value in both "Love and Life" and "To a Lady, in a Letter," below. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Scholars suggest that Rochester elaborates on an idea from Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651): "The present only has a being in nature; things past have a being in the memory only, but things to come have no being at all; the future being but a fiction of the mind." [Return to reference 2](#)

# Notes

- °: *possession, inheritance* [Return to reference °](#)

## To a Lady, in a Letter

Such perfect bliss, fair Cloris, we  
In our enjoyment prove:  
'Tis pity restless jealousy  
Should mingle with our love.

5 Let us, since wit has taught us how,  
Raise pleasure to the top:  
You rival bottle must allow,  
I'll suffer rival fop.<sup>o</sup><sub>—</sub>

10 Think not in this that I design  
A treason 'gainst love's charms,  
When following the God of Wine  
I leave my Cloris arms.

15 Since you have that, for all your haste,  
At which I'll ne're repine,<sup>o</sup><sub>—</sub>  
Will take its liquor off as fast,  
As I can take off mine.<sup>1</sup>

20 There's not a brisk insipid spark<sup>o</sup><sub>—</sub>  
That flutters in the town:  
But with your wanton eyes you mark  
Him out to be your own.

Nor do you think it worth your care  
How empty, and how dull  
The heads of your admirers are,  
So that their bags<sup>2</sup> be full.

25 All this you freely may confess,  
Yet we ne'er disagree:

For did you love your pleasure less,  
You were no match for me.

30      Whilst I, my pleasure to pursue,  
            Whole nights am taking in  
The lusty juice of grapes, take you  
            The juice of lusty men.

1676 **Endnotes**

1691

- Note 1: Both sex and drinking involve “taking off” liquids into one’s body. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Different manuscript versions also have “purse” or “cods” here. “Cods,” like “bags,” could refer to moneybags or the scrotum. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *fashionable gentleman* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *never complain* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dull but fashionable youth* [Return to reference °](#)

## Song [Love a woman! You're an ass]<sup>1</sup>

Love a woman! You're an ass,  
'Tis a most insipid<sup>o</sup> passion,  
To choose out for happiness  
The idlest part of God's creation.

5 Let the porter and the groom,<sup>2</sup>  
Things designed for dirty slaves,  
Drudge in fair Aurelia's womb,  
To get supplies for age and graves.

10 Farewell woman, I intend  
Henceforth ev'ry night to sit  
With my lewd well-natured friend,  
Drinking, to engender<sup>o</sup> wit.

15 Then give me health, wealth, mirth, and wine,  
And if busy love entrenches,<sup>o</sup>  
There's a sweet soft page<sup>o</sup> of mine,  
Does the trick worth forty wenches.

## Endnotes

1680

- Note 1: Repurposing the song form often used for love lyrics, Rochester refuses both the genre's traditional values and heterosexual relationships generally. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The servants who attend the door and care for the horses, imagined as doing the servile labor of heterosexual reproduction. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes



- °: *stupid, uninteresting*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *produce, generate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *intrudes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *servant boy*[Return to reference](#) °

## APHRA BEHN

### 1640?–1689

"A woman wit has often graced the stage," Dryden wrote in 1681. Soon after women actors first appeared in English public theaters, there was an even more striking debut by a woman writer who boldly signed her plays and talked back to her critics. In a dozen years, Aphra Behn turned out at least that many plays, discovering fresh dramatic possibilities in the new casts of women and men. She also drew attention as a warm and witty poet of love. When writing for the stage became less profitable, she turned to prose fiction, composing a pioneering epistolary novel, *Love Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister*, and diverse short tales—not to mention a raft of translations from the French, pindarics to her beloved Stuart rulers, compilations, prologues, complimentary verses, all the piecework and puffery that were the stock in trade of the Restoration town wit. She worked in haste and with flair for nearly two decades and more than held her own as a professional writer. She is one of the most versatile authors of her age—alive to new currents of thought and inventive in recasting fashionable forms.

Much of Behn's life remains a mystery. Although her books have been accompanied—and often all but buried—by volumes of rumor, hard facts are elusive. She was almost certainly from East Kent; she may well have been named Johnson. But she herself seems to have left no record of her date and place of birth, her family name and upbringing, or the identity of the shadowy Mr. Behn whom she

reportedly married. Her many references to nuns and convents, as well as praise for prominent Catholic lords (*Oroonoko* is dedicated to one), have prompted speculation that she may have been raised as a Catholic and educated in a convent abroad. Without doubt, she drew on a range of worldly experience that would be closed to women in the more genteel ages to come. The circumstantial detail of *Oroonoko* supports her claim that she was in the new sugar colony of Surinam, on the northeastern Atlantic coast of South America, early in 1664. Perhaps she exaggerated her social position to enhance her tale, but many particulars—from dialect words and the location of plantations to methods of selling and torturing enslaved people—can be authenticated. During the trade war that broke out in 1665, Behn says regretfully, the “vast and charming world” she knew in Surinam was seized from the British by the Dutch; that year she traveled to the Low Countries on a spying mission for King Charles II. The king could be lax about payment, however, and Behn had to petition desperately to escape debtor’s prison. In 1670 she brought out her first plays, “forced to write for bread,” she confessed, “and not ashamed to own it.”

In London, Behn flourished in the cosmopolitan world of the playhouse and the court. Dryden and other wits encouraged her; she mixed with actresses and managers and playwrights and exchanged verses with a lively literary set that she called her “cabal.” Surviving letters record a passionate, troubled attachment to a lawyer named John Hoyle, a man with libertine views and bisexual desires. She kept up with the most advanced thinking and joined public debates with pointed satire against the Whigs. But the festivity of the Restoration world was fading out in bitter party acrimony. In 1682 Behn was placed under arrest for “abusive reflections” on the king’s illegitimate son, the Whig Duke of Monmouth (Dryden’s “Absalom”). Her Royalist opinions and the immodesty of her public role made her a target; gleeful lampoons declared that she was aging and ill and once again poor. She responded by bringing out her works at a still faster rate, composing *Oroonoko*, her dedication claims, “in a few hours . . . for I never rested my pen a moment for thought.” In some

last works she recorded her hope that her writings would live: "I value fame as much as if I had been born a hero." When she died she was buried in Westminster Abbey.

"All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the grave of Aphra Behn," Virginia Woolf wrote, "for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds." Behn herself spoke her mind. She scorned hypocrisy and calculation in her society and commented freely on religion, science, and philosophy. Moreover, she spoke as a woman. Denied the classical education available to men, she dismissed "musty rules" and lessons and relished the immediate human appeal of popular forms. Her first play, *The Forced Marriage*, exposes the bondage of matches arranged for money and status, and many later works invoke the powerful natural force of love, whose energy breaks through conventions. In a range of genres, from simple pastoral songs to complex plots of intrigue, she candidly explores the sexual feelings of women, their schooling in disguise, their need to "love upon the honest square" (for this her work was later denounced as coarse and impure). *Oroonoko* represents another departure for Behn and prose fiction. It achieves something new both in its narrative form and in extending some of her favorite themes to an original subject: the destiny of a Black male hero on a world historical stage.

*Oroonoko* cannot be classified as fact or fiction, realism or romance. In the still unshaped field of prose narrative—where a "history" could mean any story, true or false—Behn combined the attractions of three older forms. First, she presents the work as a memoir, a personal account of what she has heard and seen. According to a friend, Behn had told this tale over and over; perhaps that explains the conversational ease with which she turns back and forth, interpreting faraway scenes for her readers at home. Second, *Oroonoko* is a travel narrative in three parts. It turns west to a new world often extolled as a paradise, then east to Africa and the amorous intrigues of a corrupt old-world court (popular reading fare), then finally west again with its hero across the infamous Middle Passage—over which millions of enslaved people would be

transported during the next century—to the conflicts of a raw colonial world. Exotic scenes fascinate Behn, but she wants even more to talk to people and learn about their ways of life. As in imaginary voyages, from Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* to *Gulliver's Travels* and *Rasselas*, encounters with foreign cultures sharply challenge Europeans to reexamine themselves. The uncorrupted Indigenous Americans and noble Africans portrayed by Behn live by a code of virtue, by principles of fidelity and honor, that "civilized" Christians often ignore or betray. Oroonoko embodies this code. Above all, the book is his biography. Courageous, high-minded, and great-hearted, he rivals the heroes of classical epics and Plutarch's *Lives* and is equally worthy of fame. Nor does he lack gentler virtues. Like the heroes of seventeenth-century heroic dramas and romances, he shines in the company of women and proves his nobility by his passionate and constant love for Imoinda, his ideal counterpart. Yet finally a contradiction dooms Oroonoko: he is at once prince and chattel, a "royal slave."

Behn handles her forms dynamically, drawing out their inner discords and tensions. In the biography, Oroonoko's deepest values are turned against him. His trust in friendship and scrupulous truth to his word expose him to the treachery of Europeans who calculate human worth on a yardstick of profit. A hero cannot survive in such a world. His self-respect demands action, even when he can find no clear path through the tangle of assurances and lies. Moreover, the colony too seems tangled in contradictions. Behn's travel narrative reveals a broken paradise where, in the absence of secure authority, the settlers descend into a series of unstable alliances, improvised power relations, and escalating suspicions. Here every term—friend and foe, tenderness and brutality, savagery and civilization—can suddenly turn into its opposite. And the author also seems caught between worlds. The cultivated Englishwoman who narrates and acts in this memoir thinks highly of her hero's code of honor and shares his contempt for the ruffraff who plague him. Yet her own role is ambiguous: she lacks the power to save Oroonoko and might be

viewed as implicated in his downfall. Only as a writer can she take control, preserving the hero in her work.

The story of Oroonoko did not end with Behn. Compassion for the royal slave and outrage at his fate were enlisted in the long battle against the trade in enslaved people. Reprinted, translated, serialized, dramatized, and much imitated, *Oroonoko* helped teach a mass audience to feel for all victims of the brutal commerce in human beings. A hundred years later, the popular writer Hannah More testified to the widening influence of the story: "No individual griefs my bosom melt, / For millions feel what Oroonoko felt." Behn, a "woman wit," had this widespread influence—she wrote poems and plays, helped shape the emerging novel, and gave future generations a powerful character through which to understand the pain of being treated as something less than fully human.

# The Disappointment<sup>1</sup>

One day the amorous Lysander,  
By an impatient passion swayed,  
Surprised fair Cloris, that loved maid,  
Who could defend herself no longer.  
All things did with his love conspire;  
5 The gilded planet of the day,<sup>o</sup>  
In his gay chariot drawn by fire,  
Was now descending to the sea,  
And left no light to guide the world  
But what from Cloris' brighter eyes was hurled.  
10

In a lone thicket made for love,  
Silent as yielding maid's consent,  
She with a charming languishment,  
Permits his force, yet gently strove;  
Her hands his bosom softly meet,  
15 But not to put him back designed,  
Rather to draw 'em on inclined:  
Whilst he lay trembling at her feet,  
Resistance 'tis in vain to show:  
She wants<sup>o</sup> the power to say—*Ah! what d'ye do?*  
20

Her bright eyes sweet and yet severe,  
Where love and shame confusedly strive,  
Fresh vigor to Lysander give;  
And breathing faintly in his ear,  
She cried—*Cease, cease—your vain desire,*  
25 *Or I'll call out—what would you do?*  
*My dearer honor even to you*  
*I cannot, must not give—Retire,*  
*Or take this life, whose chiefest part*

30 *I gave you with the conquest of my heart.*

But he as much unused to fear,  
As he was capable of love,  
The blessed minutes to improve  
Kisses her mouth, her neck, her hair;  
Each touch her new desire alarms;  
35 His burning, trembling hand he pressed  
Upon her swelling snowy breast,  
While she lay panting in his arms.  
All her unguarded beauties lie  
The spoils and trophies of the enemy.

40 And now without respect or fear  
He seeks the object of his vows  
(His love no modesty allows)  
By swift degrees advancing—where  
His daring hand that altar seized,  
45 Where gods of love do sacrifice:  
That awful throne, that paradise  
Where rage is calmed, and anger pleased;  
That fountain where delight still flows,  
And gives the universal world repose.

50 Her balmy lips encountering his,  
Their bodies, as their souls, are joined;  
Where both in transports unconfined  
Extend themselves upon the moss.  
Cloris half dead and breathless lay;  
55 Her soft eyes cast a humid light  
Such as divides the day and night;  
Or falling stars, whose fires decay:  
And now no signs of life she shows,  
But what in short-breathed sighs returns and goes.

60 He saw how at her length she lay;



He saw her rising bosom bare;  
Her loose thin robes, through which appear  
A shape designed for love and play;  
Abandoned by her pride and shame  
65 She does her softest joys dispense,  
Offering her virgin innocence  
A victim to love's sacred flame;  
While the o'er-ravished shepherd lies  
Unable to perform the sacrifice.  
70

Ready to taste a thousand joys,  
The too transported hapless swain  
Found the vast pleasure turned to pain;  
Pleasure which too much love destroys:  
75 The willing garments by he laid,<sup>2</sup>  
And heaven all opened to his view.  
Mad to possess, himself he threw  
On the defenseless lovely maid.  
But oh what envying god conspires  
To snatch his power, yet leave him the desire!  
80

Nature's support (without whose aid  
She can no human being give)  
Itself now wants the art<sup>3</sup> to live;  
Faintness its slackened nerves invade:  
85 In vain th'enraged youth essayed  
To call its fleeting vigor back;  
No motion 'twill from motion take;  
Excess of love his love betrayed:  
In vain he toils, in vain commands:  
90 The insensible<sup>4</sup> fell weeping in his hand.

In this so amorous cruel strife,  
Where love and fate were too severe,  
The poor Lysander in despair  
Renounced his reason with his life:

95 Now all the brisk and active fire  
That should the nobler part inflame  
Served to increase his rage and shame,  
And left no spark for new desire:  
Not all her naked charms could move  
Or calm that rage that had debauched his love.

100

Cloris returning from the trance  
Which love and soft desire had bred,  
Her timorous hand she gently laid  
(Or guided by design or chance)  
Upon that fabulous Priapus,<sup>5</sup>  
105 That potent god, as poets feign:  
But never did young shepherdess,  
Gathering the fern upon the plain,  
More nimbly draw her fingers back,  
Finding beneath the verdant leaves a snake,

110

Than Cloris her fair hand withdrew,  
Finding that god of her desires  
Disarmed of all his awful fires,  
And cold as flowers bathed in the morning dew.  
Who can the nymph's confusion guess?  
115 The blood forsook the hinder place,  
And strewed with blushes all her face,  
Which both disdain and shame expressed:  
And from Lysander's arms she fled,  
Leaving him fainting on the gloomy bed.

120

Like lightning through the grove she hies,  
Or Daphne from the Delphic god;<sup>6</sup>  
No print upon the grassy road  
She leaves, to instruct pursuing eyes.  
The wind that wantoned in her hair  
125 And with her ruffled garments played,  
Discovered in the flying maid

All that the gods e'er made, if fair.  
 So Venus, when her love<sup>7</sup> was slain,  
 With fear and haste flew o'er the fatal plain.  
 130  
 The nymph's resentments none but I  
 Can well imagine or condole:  
 But none can guess Lysander's soul,  
 But those who swayed his destiny.  
 135 His silent griefs swell up to storms,  
 And not one god his fury spares;  
 He cursed his birth, his fate, his stars;  
 But more the shepherdess's charms,  
 Whose soft bewitching influence  
 140 Had damned him to the hell of impotence.<sup>8</sup>

## Endnotes

1680

- Note 1: This variation on the "imperfect enjoyment" genre compares with Rochester's (p. 134); it first appeared in a collection of his poems. But Behn gives the theme of impotence her own twist. Freely translating a French poem, Cantenac's "The Lost Chance Recovered," she cuts the conclusion, in which the French lover regained his potency, and she highlights the woman's feelings as well as the man's.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: He took off her compliant clothes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lacks the capacity.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Devoid of feeling and too small to be noticed.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Phallus. The ancient god Priapus is always pictured with an outstanding erection.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Apollo, from whom the Greek nymph Daphne fled until she turned into a laurel tree.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Adonis, who was killed by a boar.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Blaming the woman for an imperfect enjoyment is typical of the genre.[Return to reference 8](#)

# Notes

- °: *the sun*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lacks*[Return to reference](#) °

# To the Fair Clarinda, Who Made Love to Me, Imagined More than Woman. By Mrs.

B.<sup>1</sup>

Fair lovely maid, or if that title be  
Too weak, too feminine for nobler thee,  
Permit a name that more approaches truth:  
And let me call thee lovely charming youth<sup>2</sup>  
This last will justify my soft complaint,  
5 While that<sup>3</sup> may serve to lessen my constraint;  
And without blushes I the youth pursue,  
When so much beauteous woman is in view.  
Against thy charms we struggle but in vain  
With thy deluding form thou giv'st us pain,  
10 While the bright nymph betrays us to the swain.<sup>4</sup>  
In pity to our sex sure thou wert sent,  
That we might love, and yet be innocent:  
For sure no crime with thee we can commit;  
Or if we should—thy form excuses it.  
15 For who that gathers fairest flowers believes  
A snake lies hid beneath the fragrant leaves.

Thou beauteous wonder of a different kind,  
Soft Cloris with the dear Alexis<sup>5</sup> joined;  
When e'er the manly part of thee would plead  
20 Thou tempts us with the image of the maid,  
While we the noblest passions do extend  
The love to Hermes, Aphrodite<sup>6</sup> the friend.

- Note 1: This poem first appeared as the last in a 1688 miscellany of various authors' poems (many of them addressed to Behn, using her nickname Astrea) appended by Behn to her translation from the French of a longer narrative work, *Lycidus, or the Lover in Fashion*, by Paul Tallemant.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Youth" typically referred to a male person between boyhood and maturity.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, the title "fair lovely maid."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "Swain" and "nymph" used in their senses common in pastoral poetry of male and female lovers, respectively.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Cloris" and "Alexis," conventional female and male names, respectively, in pastoral poetry.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Aphrodite and Hermes were Greek gods of female and male sexuality, respectively (among other roles). Their son, Hermaphroditus, was assaulted by the nymph Salmacis, who prayed to be united with him; thereafter they became a single being with male and female attributes.[Return to reference 6](#)

# Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave<sup>1</sup>

*From Epistle Dedicatory*

*To the Right Honorable the Lord Maitland<sup>2</sup>*

\* \* \*

My lord, the obligations I have to some of the great men of your nation, particularly to your lordship, gives me an ambition of making my acknowledgements by all the opportunities I can; and such humble fruits as my industry produces I lay at your lordship's feet. This is a true story, of a man gallant enough to merit your protection, and, had he always been so fortunate, he had not made so inglorious an end. The Royal Slave I had the honor to know in my travels to the other world; and though I had none above me in that country, yet I wanted power to preserve this great man.<sup>3</sup> If there be anything that seems romantic,<sup>4</sup> I beseech your lordship to consider these countries do, in all things, so far differ from ours that they produce unconceivable wonders; at least, they appear so to us, because new and strange. What I have mentioned I have taken care should be truth, let the critical reader judge as he pleases. 'Twill be no commendation to the book to assure your lordship I writ it in a few hours, though it may serve to excuse some of its faults of connection, for I never rested my pen a moment for thought: 'Tis purely the merit of my slave<sup>5</sup> that must render it worthy of the honor it begs; and the author of that of subscribing herself,

My lord  
Your Lordship's most obliged and obedient Servant  
A. Behn.

I do not pretend, in giving you the history of this royal slave, to entertain my reader with the adventures of a feigned hero, whose life and fortunes fancy may manage at the poet's pleasure; nor in relating the truth, design to adorn it with any accidents but such as arrived in earnest to him. And it shall come simply into the world, recommended by its own proper merits and natural intrigues, there being enough of reality to support it, and to render it diverting, without the addition of invention.

I was myself an eyewitness to a great part of what you will find here set down, and what I could not be witness of, I received from the mouth of the chief actor in this history, the hero himself, who gave us the whole transactions of his youth; and though I shall omit for brevity's sake a thousand little accidents of his life, which, however pleasant to us, where history was scarce and adventures very rare, yet might prove tedious and heavy to my reader, in a world where he finds diversions for every minute, new and strange. But we who were perfectly charmed with the character of this great man were curious to gather every circumstance of his life.

The scene of the last part of his adventures lies in a colony in America called Surinam,<sup>6</sup> in the West Indies.

But before I give you the story of this gallant slave, 'tis fit I tell you the manner of bringing them to these new colonies, for those they make use of there are not natives of the place; for those we live with in perfect amity, without daring to command 'em, but on the contrary caress 'em with all the brotherly and friendly affection in the world, trading with 'em for their fish, venison, buffaloes, skins, and little rarities; as marmosets, a sort of monkey as big as a rat or weasel but of a marvelous and delicate shape, and has face and hands like a human creature, and *cousheries*,<sup>7</sup> a little beast in the form and fashion of a lion, as big as a kitten, but so exactly made in all parts like that noble beast, that it is it in miniature. Then for little parakeetoes, great parrots, macaws, and a thousand other birds and beasts of wonderful and surprising forms, shapes, and colors. For skins of prodigious snakes, of which there are some threescore yards in length, as is the skin of one that may be seen at his Majesty's



antiquaries'; where are also some rare flies<sup>8</sup> of amazing forms and colors, presented to 'em by myself, some as big as my fist, some less, and all of various excellencies, such as art cannot imitate. Then we trade for feathers, which they order into all shapes, make themselves little short habits of 'em, and glorious wreaths for their heads, necks, arms and legs, whose tinctures are unconceivable. I had a set of these presented to me, and I gave 'em to the King's theater, and it was the dress of the Indian Queen,<sup>9</sup> infinitely admired by persons of quality, and were unimitable. Besides these, a thousand little knacks and rarities in nature, and some of art, as their baskets, weapons, aprons, et cetera. We dealt with 'em with beads of all colors, knives, axes, pins and needles, which they used only as tools to drill holes with in their ears, noses, and lips, where they hang a great many little things, as long beads, bits of tin, brass, or silver beat thin, and any shining trinket. The beads they weave into aprons about a quarter of an ell long, and of the same breadth,<sup>1</sup> working them very prettily in flowers of several colors of beads; which apron they wear just before 'em, as Adam and Eve did the fig leaves, the men wearing a long stripe of linen which they deal with us for. They thread these beads also on long cotton threads and make girdles to tie their aprons to, which come twenty times or more about the waist, and then cross, like a shoulder belt, both ways, and round their necks, arms, and legs. This adornment, with their long black hair, and the face painted in little specks or flowers here and there, makes 'em a wonderful figure to behold.

Some of the beauties which indeed are finely shaped, as almost all are, and who have pretty features, are very charming and novel; for they have all that is called beauty, except the color, which is a reddish yellow; or after a new oiling, which they often use to themselves, they are of the color of a new brick, but smooth, soft, and sleek. They are extreme<sup>2</sup> modest and bashful, very shy and nice of being touched. And though they are all thus naked, if one lives forever among 'em there is not to be seen an indecent action or glance; and being continually used to see one another so unadorned, so like our first parents before the Fall, it seems as if they had no

wishes; there being nothing to heighten curiosity, but all you can see you see at once, and every moment see, and where there is no novelty there can be no curiosity. Not but I have seen a handsome young Indian dying for love of a very beautiful young Indian maid; but all his courtship was to fold his arms, pursue her with his eyes, and sighs were all his language; while she, as if no such lover were present, or rather, as if she desired none such, carefully guarded her eyes from beholding him, and never approached him but she looked down with all the blushing modesty I have seen in the most severe and cautious of our world. And these people represented to me an absolute idea of the first state of innocence, before man knew how to sin. And 'tis most evident and plain that simple Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive, and virtuous mistress. 'Tis she alone, if she were permitted, that better instructs the world than all the inventions of man. Religion would here but destroy that tranquillity they possess by ignorance, and laws would but teach 'em to know offense, of which now they have no notion. They once made mourning and fasting for the death of the English governor, who had given his hand to come on such a day to 'em and neither came nor sent, believing when once a man's word was passed, nothing but death could or should prevent his keeping it. And when they saw he was not dead, they asked him what name they had for a man who promised a thing he did not do. The governor told them, such a man was a liar, which was a word of infamy to a gentleman. Then one of 'em replied, "Governor, you are a liar, and guilty of that infamy." They have a native justice which knows no fraud, and they understand no vice or cunning, but when they are taught by the white men. They have plurality of wives, which, when they grow old, they serve those that succeed 'em, who are young, but with a servitude easy and respected; and unless they take slaves in war, they have no other attendants.

Those on that continent where I was had no king, but the oldest war captain was obeyed with great resignation. A war captain is a man who has led them on to battle with conduct<sup>3</sup> and success, of

whom I shall have occasion to speak more hereafter, and of some other of their customs and manners, as they fall in my way.

With these people, as I said, we live in perfect tranquillity and good understanding, as it behooves us to do, they knowing all the places where to seek the best food of the country and the means of getting it, and for very small and unvaluable trifles, supply us with what 'tis impossible for us to get; for they do not only in the wood and over the savannas, in hunting, supply the parts of hounds, by swiftly scouring through those almost impassable places, and by the mere activity of their feet run down the nimblest deer and other eatable beasts; but in the water one would think they were gods of the rivers, or fellow citizens of the deep, so rare an art they have in swimming, diving, and almost living in water, by which they command the less swift inhabitants of the floods. And then for shooting, what they cannot take, or reach with their hands, they do with arrows, and have so admirable an aim that they will split almost a hair; and at any distance that an arrow can reach, they will shoot down oranges and other fruit, and only touch the stalk with the dart's point, that they may not hurt the fruit. So that they being, on all occasions, very useful to us, we find it absolutely necessary to caress 'em as friends, and not to treat 'em as slaves; nor dare we do other, their numbers so far surpassing ours in that continent.

Those then whom we make use of to work in our plantations of sugar are Negroes, black slaves altogether, which are transported thither in this manner. Those who want slaves make a bargain with a master or captain of a ship and contract to pay him so much apiece, a matter of twenty pound a head for as many as he agrees for, and to pay for 'em when they shall be delivered on such a plantation. So that when there arrives a ship laden with slaves, they who have so contracted go aboard and receive their number by lot; and perhaps in one lot that may be for ten, there may happen to be three or four men, the rest women and children. Or be there more or less of either sex, you are obliged to be contented with your lot.

Coramantien,<sup>4</sup> a country of blacks so called, was one of those places in which they found the most advantageous trading for these

slaves, and thither most of our great traders in that merchandise trafficked; for that nation is very warlike and brave, and having a continual campaign, being always in hostility with one neighboring prince or other, they had the fortune to take a great many captives; for all they took in battle were sold as slaves, at least those common men who could not ransom themselves. Of these slaves so taken, the general only has all the profit; and of these generals, our captains and masters of ships buy all their freights.

The King of Coramantien was himself a man of a hundred and odd years old, and had no son, though he had many beautiful black wives; for most certainly there are beauties that can charm of that color. In his younger years he had had many gallant men to his sons, thirteen of which died in battle, conquering when they fell; and he had only left him for his successor one grandchild, son to one of these dead victors, who, as soon as he could bear a bow in his hand and a quiver at his back, was sent into the field, to be trained up by one of the oldest generals to war; where, from his natural inclination to arms and the occasions given him, with the good conduct of the old general, he became, at the age of seventeen, one of the most expert captains and bravest soldiers that ever saw the field of Mars. So that he was adored as the wonder of all that world, and the darling of the soldiers. Besides, he was adorned with a native beauty so transcending all those of his gloomy race that he struck an awe and reverence even in those that knew not his quality; as he did in me, who beheld him with surprise and wonder, when afterwards he arrived in our world.

He had scarce arrived at his seventeenth year, when fighting by his side, the general was killed with an arrow in his eye, which the Prince Oroonoko (for so was this gallant Moor<sup>5</sup> called) very narrowly avoided; nor had he, if the general, who saw the arrow shot, and perceiving it aimed at the Prince, had not bowed his head between, on purpose to receive it in his own body rather than it should touch that of the Prince, and so saved him.

'Twas then, afflicted as Oroonoko was, that he was proclaimed general in the old man's place; and then it was, at the finishing of

that war, which had continued for two years, that the Prince came to court, where he had hardly been a month together from the time of his fifth year to that of seventeen; and 'twas amazing to imagine where it was he learned so much humanity; or to give his accomplishments a juster name, where 'twas he got that real greatness of soul, those refined notions of true honor, that absolute generosity, and that softness that was capable of the highest passions of love and gallantry, whose objects were almost continually fighting men, or those mangled or dead; who heard no sounds but those of war and groans. Some part of it we may attribute to the care of a Frenchman of wit and learning, who, finding it turn to very good account to be a sort of royal tutor to this young black, and perceiving him very ready, apt, and quick of apprehension, took a great pleasure to teach him morals, language, and science, and was for it extremely beloved and valued by him. Another reason was, he loved, when he came from war, to see all the English gentlemen that traded thither, and did not only learn their language but that of the Spaniards also, with whom he traded afterwards for slaves.

I have often seen and conversed with this great man, and been a witness to many of his mighty actions, and do assure my reader the most illustrious courts could not have produced a braver man, both for greatness of courage and mind, a judgment more solid, a wit more quick, and a conversation more sweet and diverting. He knew almost as much as if he had read much. He had heard of and admired the Romans; he had heard of the late civil wars in England, and the deplorable death of our great monarch,<sup>6</sup> and would discourse of it with all the sense and abhorrence of the injustice imaginable. He had an extreme good and graceful mien, and all the civility of a well-bred great man. He had nothing of barbarity in his nature, but in all points addressed himself as if his education had been in some European court.

This great and just character of Oroonoko gave me an extreme curiosity to see him, especially when I knew he spoke French and English, and that I could talk with him. But though I had heard so much of him, I was as greatly surprised when I saw him as if I had

heard nothing of him, so beyond all report I found him. He came into the room and addressed himself to me, and some other women, with the best grace in the world. He was pretty tall, but of a shape the most exact that can be fancied. The most famous statuary<sup>7</sup> could not form the figure of a man more admirably turned from head to foot. His face was not of that brown, rusty black which most of that nation are, but a perfect ebony or polished jet. His eyes were the most awful that could be seen, and very piercing, the white of 'em being like snow, as were his teeth. His nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat; his mouth the finest shaped that could be seen, far from those great turned lips which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes. The whole proportion and air of his face was so noble and exactly formed that, bating<sup>8</sup> his color, there could be nothing in nature more beautiful, agreeable, and handsome. There was no one grace wanting that bears the standard of true beauty. His hair came down to his shoulders by the aids of art; which was by pulling it out with a quill and keeping it combed, of which he took particular care. Nor did the perfections of his mind come short of those of his person, for his discourse was admirable upon almost any subject; and whoever had heard him speak would have been convinced of their errors, that all fine wit is confined to the white men, especially to those of Christendom, and would have confessed that Oroonoko was as capable even of reigning well, and of governing as wisely, had as great a soul, as politic<sup>9</sup> maxims, and was as sensible of power, as any prince civilized in the most refined schools of humanity and learning, or the most illustrious courts.

This prince, such as I have described him, whose soul and body were so admirably adorned, was (while yet he was in the court of his grandfather), as I said, as capable of love as 'twas possible for a brave and gallant man to be; and in saying that, I have named the highest degree of love, for sure, great souls are most capable of that passion.

I have already said, the old general was killed by the shot of an arrow, by the side of this prince, in battle, and that Oroonoko was made general. This old dead hero had one only daughter left of his



race, a beauty that, to describe her truly, one need say only she was female to the noble male, the beautiful black Venus to our young Mars, as charming in her person as he, and of delicate virtues. I have seen an hundred white men sighing after her, and making a thousand vows at her feet, all vain and unsuccessful. And she was, indeed, too great for any but a prince of her own nation to adore.

Oroonoko coming from the wars (which were now ended), after he had made his court to his grandfather, he thought in honor he ought to make a visit to Imoinda, the daughter of his foster-father, the dead general; and to make some excuses to her, because his preservation was the occasion of her father's death; and to present her with those slaves that had been taken in this last battle, as the trophies of her father's victories. When he came, attended by all the young soldiers of any merit, he was infinitely surprised at the beauty of this fair queen of night, whose face and person was so exceeding all he had ever beheld; that lovely modesty with which she received him; that softness in her look, and sighs, upon the melancholy occasion of this honor that was done by so great a man as Oroonoko, and a prince of whom she had heard such admirable things: the awfulness<sup>1</sup> wherewith she received him, and the sweetness of her words and behavior while he stayed, gained a perfect conquest over his fierce heart, and made him feel the victor could be subdued. So that having made his first compliments, and presented her a hundred and fifty slaves in fetters, he told her with his eyes that he was not insensible of her charms; while Imoinda, who wished for nothing more than so glorious a conquest, was pleased to believe she understood that silent language of newborn love, and from that moment put on all her additions to beauty.

The Prince returned to court with quite another humor than before; and though he did not speak much of the fair Imoinda, he had the pleasure to hear all his followers speak of nothing but the charms of that maid, insomuch that, even in the presence of the old king, they were extolling her and heightening, if possible, the beauties they had found in her. So that nothing else was talked of,

no other sound was heard in every corner where there were whisperers, but "Imoinda! Imoinda!"

'Twill be imagined Oroonoko stayed not long before he made his second visit, nor, considering his quality, not much longer before he told her he adored her. I have often heard him say that he admired by what strange inspiration he came to talk things so soft and so passionate, who never knew love, nor was used to the conversation<sup>2</sup> of women; but (to use his own words) he said, most happily some new and till then unknown power instructed his heart and tongue in the language of love, and at the same time, in favor of him, inspired Imoinda with a sense of his passion. She was touched with what he said, and returned it all in such answers as went to his very heart, with a pleasure unknown before. Nor did he use those obligations<sup>3</sup> ill that love had done him, but turned all his happy moments to the best advantage; and as he knew no vice, his flame aimed at nothing but honor, if such a distinction may be made in love; and especially in that country, where men take to themselves as many as they can maintain, and where the only crime and sin with woman is to turn her off, to abandon her to want, shame, and misery. Such ill morals are only practiced in Christian countries, where they prefer the bare name of religion, and, without virtue or morality, think that's sufficient. But Oroonoko was none of those professors, but as he had right notions of honor, so he made her such propositions as were not only and barely such; but contrary to the custom of his country, he made her vows she should be the only woman he would possess while he lived; that no age or wrinkles should incline him to change, for her soul would be always fine and always young, and he should have an eternal idea in his mind of the charms she now bore, and should look into his heart for that idea when he could find it no longer in her face.

After a thousand assurances of his lasting flame, and her eternal empire over him, she condescended to receive him for her husband, or rather, received him as the greatest honor the gods could do her.

There is a certain ceremony in these cases to be observed, which I forgot to ask him how performed; but 'twas concluded on both



sides that, in obedience to him, the grandfather was to be first made acquainted with the design, for they pay a most absolute resignation to the monarch, especially when he is a parent also.

On the other side, the old king, who had many wives and many concubines, wanted not court flatterers to insinuate in his heart a thousand tender thoughts for this young beauty, and who represented her to his fancy as the most charming he had ever possessed in all the long race of his numerous years. At this character his old heart, like an extinguished brand, most apt to take fire, felt new sparks of love and began to kindle; and now grown to his second childhood, longed with impatience to behold this gay thing, with whom, alas! he could but innocently play. But how he should be confirmed she was this wonder, before he used his power to call her to court (where maidens never came, unless for the King's private use), he was next to consider; and while he was so doing, he had intelligence brought him that Imoinda was most certainly mistress to the Prince Oroonoko. This gave him some chagrin; however, it gave him also an opportunity, one day when the Prince was a-hunting, to wait on a man of quality, as his slave and attendant, who should go and make a present to Imoinda as from the Prince; he should then, unknown, see this fair maid, and have an opportunity to hear what message she would return the Prince for his present, and from thence gather the state of her heart and degree of her inclination. This was put in execution, and the old monarch saw, and burned. He found her all he had heard, and would not delay his happiness, but found he should have some obstacle to overcome her heart; for she expressed her sense of the present the Prince had sent her in terms so sweet, so soft and pretty, with an air of love and joy that could not be dissembled, insomuch that 'twas past doubt whether she loved Oroonoko entirely. This gave the old king some affliction, but he salved it with this, that the obedience the people pay their king was not at all inferior to what they paid their gods; and what love would not oblige Imoinda to do, duty would compel her to.

He was therefore no sooner got to his apartment but he sent the royal veil to Imoinda, that is, the ceremony of invitation: he sends

the lady he has a mind to honor with his bed a veil, with which she is covered, and secured for the King's use; and 'tis death to disobey, besides held a most impious disobedience.

'Tis not to be imagined the surprise and grief that seized this lovely maid at this news and sight. However, as delays in these cases are dangerous and pleading worse than treason, trembling, and almost fainting, she was obliged to suffer herself to be covered and led away.

They brought her thus to court; and the King, who had caused a very rich bath to be prepared, was led into it, where he sat under a canopy, in state, to receive this longed-for virgin; whom he having commanded should be brought to him, they (after disrobing her) led her to the bath, and making fast the doors, left her to descend. The King, without more courtship, bade her throw off her mantle and come to his arms. But Imoinda, all in tears, threw herself on the marble, on the brink of the bath, and besought him to hear her. She told him, as she was a maid, how proud of the divine glory she should have been, of having it in her power to oblige her king; but as by the laws he could not, and from his royal goodness would not, take from any man his wedded wife, so she believed she should be the occasion of making him commit a great sin, if she did not reveal her state and condition, and tell him she was another's, and could not be so happy to be his.

The King, enraged at this delay, hastily demanded the name of the bold man that had married a woman of her degree without his consent. Imoinda, seeing his eyes fierce and his hands tremble (whether with age or anger, I know not, but she fancied the last), almost repented she had said so much, for now she feared the storm would fall on the Prince. She therefore said a thousand things to appease the raging of his flame, and to prepare him to hear who it was with calmness; but before she spoke, he imagined who she meant, but would not seem to do so, but commanded her to lay aside her mantle and suffer herself to receive his caresses; or by his gods, he swore that happy man whom she was going to name should die, though it were even Oroonoko himself. "Therefore," said

he, "deny this marriage, and swear thyself a maid." "That," replied Imoinda, "by all our powers I do, for I am not yet known to my husband." "'Tis enough," said the King; "'tis enough to satisfy both my conscience and my heart." And rising from his seat, he went and led her into the bath, it being in vain for her to resist.

In this time the Prince, who was returned from hunting, went to visit his Imoinda, but found her gone; and not only so, but heard she had received the royal veil. This raised him to a storm, and in his madness they had much ado to save him from laying violent hands on himself. Force first prevailed, and then reason. They urged all to him that might oppose his rage, but nothing weighed so greatly with him as the King's old age, incapable of injuring him with Imoinda. He would give way to that hope, because it pleased him most, and flattered best his heart. Yet this served not altogether to make him cease his different passions, which sometimes raged within him, and sometimes softened into showers. 'Twas not enough to appease him, to tell him his grandfather was old and could not that way injure him, while he retained that awful duty which the young men are used there to pay to their grave relations. He could not be convinced he had no cause to sigh and mourn for the loss of a mistress he could not with all his strength and courage retrieve. And he would often cry, "O my friends! Were she in walled cities or confined from me in fortifications of the greatest strength, did enchantments or monsters detain her from me, I would venture through any hazard to free her. But here, in the arms of a feeble old man, my youth, my violent love, my trade in arms, and all my vast desire of glory avail me nothing. Imoinda is as irrecoverably lost to me as if she were snatched by the cold arms of Death. Oh! she is never to be retrieved. If I would wait tedious years, till fate should bow the old king to his grave, even that would not leave me Imoinda free; but still that custom that makes it so vile a crime for a son to marry his father's wives or mistresses would hinder my happiness, unless I would either ignobly set an ill precedent to my successors, or abandon my country and fly with her to some unknown world, who never heard our story."

But it was objected to him that his case was not the same; for Imoinda being his lawful wife, by solemn contract, 'twas he was the

injured man and might if he so pleased take Imoinda back, the breach of the law being on his grandfather's side; and that if he could circumvent him and redeem her from the Otan, which is the palace of the King's women, a sort of seraglio, it was both just and lawful for him so to do.

This reasoning had some force upon him, and he should have been entirely comforted, but for the thought that she was possessed by his grandfather. However, he loved so well that he was resolved to believe what most favored his hope, and to endeavor to learn from Imoinda's own mouth what only she could satisfy him in, whether she was robbed of that blessing which was only due to his faith and love. But as it was very hard to get a sight of the women (for no men ever entered into the Otan but when the King went to entertain himself with some one of his wives or mistresses, and 'twas death at any other time for any other to go in), so he knew not how to contrive to get a sight of her.

While Oroonoko felt all the agonies of love, and suffered under a torment the most painful in the world, the old king was not exempted from his share of affliction. He was troubled for having been forced by an irresistible passion to rob his son<sup>4</sup> of a treasure he knew could not but be extremely dear to him, since she was the most beautiful that ever had been seen, and had besides all the sweetness and innocence of youth and modesty, with a charm of wit surpassing all. He found that, however she was forced to expose her lovely person to his withered arms, she could only sigh and weep there, and think of Oroonoko; and oftentimes could not forbear speaking of him, though her life were, by custom, forfeited by owning her passion. But she spoke not of a lover only, but of a prince dear to him to whom she spoke, and of the praises of a man who, till now, filled the old man's soul with joy at every recital of his bravery, or even his name. And 'twas this dotage on our young hero that gave Imoinda a thousand privileges to speak of him without offending, and this condescension in the old king that made her take the satisfaction of speaking of him so very often.

Besides, he many times inquired how the Prince bore himself; and those of whom he asked, being entirely slaves to the merits and virtues of the Prince, still answered what they thought conduced best to his service; which was to make the old king fancy that the Prince had no more interest in Imoinda, and had resigned her willingly to the pleasure of the King; that he diverted himself with his mathematicians, his fortifications, his officers, and his hunting.

This pleased the old lover, who failed not to report these things again to Imoinda, that she might, by the example of her young lover, withdraw her heart, and rest better contented in his arms. But however she was forced to receive this unwelcome news, in all appearance with unconcern and content, her heart was bursting within, and she was only happy when she could get alone, to vent her griefs and moans with sighs and tears.

What reports of the Prince's conduct were made to the King, he thought good to justify as far as possibly he could by his actions, and when he appeared in the presence of the King, he showed a face not at all betraying his heart. So that in a little time, the old man being entirely convinced that he was no longer a lover of Imoinda, he carried him with him in his train to the Otan, often to banquet with his mistress. But as soon as he entered, one day, into the apartment of Imoinda with the King, at the first glance from her eyes, notwithstanding all his determined resolution, he was ready to sink in the place where he stood, and had certainly done so but for the support of Aboan, a young man who was next to him; which, with his change of countenance, had betrayed him, had the King chanced to look that way. And I have observed, 'tis a very great error, in those who laugh when one says a Negro can change color, for I have seen 'em as frequently blush, and look pale, and that as visibly as ever I saw in the most beautiful white. And 'tis certain that both these changes were evident, this day, in both these lovers. And Imoinda, who saw with some joy the change in the Prince's face, and found it in her own, strove to divert the King from beholding either by a forced caress, with which she met him, which was a new wound in the heart of the poor dying Prince. But as soon as the King was busied in looking on some fine thing of Imoinda's making, she had

time to tell the Prince with her angry but love-darting eyes that she resented his coldness, and bemoaned her own miserable captivity. Nor were his eyes silent, but answered hers again, as much as eyes could do, instructed by the most tender and most passionate heart that ever loved. And they spoke so well and so effectually, as Imoinda no longer doubted but she was the only delight and the darling of that soul she found pleading in 'em its right of love, which none was more willing to resign than she. And 'twas this powerful language alone that in an instant conveyed all the thoughts of their souls to each other, that<sup>5</sup> they both found there wanted but opportunity to make them both entirely happy. But when he saw another door opened by Onahal, a former old wife of the King's who now had charge of Imoinda, and saw the prospect of a bed of state made ready with sweets and flowers for the dalliance of the King, who immediately led the trembling victim from his sight into that prepared repose, what rage, what wild frenzies seized his heart! which forcing to keep within bounds, and to suffer without noise, it became the more insupportable, and rent his soul with ten thousand pains. He was forced to retire to vent his groans, where he fell down on a carpet and lay struggling a long time, and only breathing now and then, "—O Imoinda!"

When Onahal had finished her necessary affair within, shutting the door, she came forth to wait till the King called; and hearing someone sighing in the other room, she passed on, and found the Prince in that deplorable condition, which she thought needed her aid. She gave him cordials, but all in vain, till finding the nature of his disease by his sighs and naming Imoinda. She told him, he had not so much cause as he imagined to afflict himself, for if he knew the King so well as she did, he would not lose a moment in jealousy, and that she was confident that Imoinda bore, at this minute, part in his affliction. Aboan was of the same opinion, and both together persuaded him to reassume his courage; and all sitting down on the carpet, the Prince said so many obliging things to Onahal that he half persuaded her to be of his party. And she promised him she would

thus far comply with his just desires, that she would let Imoinda know how faithful he was, what he suffered, and what he said.

This discourse lasted till the King called, which gave Oroonoko a certain satisfaction, and with the hope Onahal had made him conceive, he assumed a look as gay as 'twas possible a man in his circumstances could do; and presently after, he was called in with the rest who waited without. The King commanded music to be brought, and several of his young wives and mistresses came all together by his command to dance before him; where Imoinda performed her part with an air and grace so passing all the rest as her beauty was above 'em, and received the present ordained as a prize. The Prince was every moment more charmed with the new beauties and graces he beheld in this fair one. And while he gazed, and she danced, Onahal was retired to a window with Aboan.

This Onahal, as I said, was one of the cast mistresses of the old king; and 'twas these (now past their beauty) that were made guardians or governants<sup>6</sup> to the new and the young ones, and whose business it was to teach them all those wanton arts of love with which they prevailed and charmed heretofore in their turn; and who now treated the triumphing happy ones with all the severity, as to liberty and freedom, that was possible, in revenge of those honors they rob them of; envying them those satisfactions, those gallantries and presents, that were once made to themselves, while youth and beauty lasted, and which they now saw pass regardless by, and paid only to the bloomings. And certainly nothing is more afflicting to a decayed beauty than to behold in itself declining charms that were once adored, and to find those caresses paid to new beauties to which once she laid a claim; to hear 'em whisper as she passes by, "That once was a delicate woman." These abandoned ladies therefore endeavor to revenge all the despites<sup>7</sup> and decays of time on these flourishing happy ones. And 'twas this severity that gave Oroonoko a thousand fears he should never prevail with Onahal to see Imoinda. But, as I said, she was now retired to a window with Aboan.

This young man was not only one of the best quality,<sup>8</sup> but a man extremely well made and beautiful; and coming often to attend the King to the Otan, he had subdued the heart of the antiquated Onahal, which had not forgot how pleasant it was to be in love. And though she had some decays in her face, she had none in her sense and wit; she was there agreeable still, even to Aboan's youth, so that he took pleasure in entertaining her with discourses of love. He knew also that to make his court to these she-favorites was the way to be great, these being the persons that do all affairs and business at court. He had also observed that she had given him glances more tender and inviting than she had done to others of his quality. And now, when he saw that her favor could so absolutely oblige the Prince, he failed not to sigh in her ear and to look with eyes all soft upon her, and give her hope that she had made some impressions on his heart. He found her pleased at this, and making a thousand advances to him; but the ceremony ending and the King departing broke up the company for that day, and his conversation.

Aboan failed not that night to tell the Prince of his success, and how advantageous the service of Onahal might be to his amour with Imoinda. The Prince was overjoyed with this good news and besought him, if it were possible, to caress her so as to engage her entirely, which he could not fail to do, if he complied with her desires. "For then," said the Prince, "her life lying at your mercy, she must grant you the request you make in my behalf." Aboan understood him, and assured him he would make love so effectually that he would defy the most expert mistress of the art to find out whether he dissembled it or had it really. And 'twas with impatience they waited the next opportunity of going to the Otan.

The wars came on, the time of taking the field approached, and 'twas impossible for the Prince to delay his going at the head of his army to encounter the enemy. So that every day seemed a tedious year till he saw his Imoinda, for he believed he could not live if he were forced away without being so happy. 'Twas with impatience, therefore, that he expected the next visit the King would make, and according to his wish, it was not long.



The parley of the eyes of these two lovers had not passed so secretly but an old jealous lover could spy it; or rather, he wanted not flatterers who told him they observed it. So that the Prince was hastened to the camp, and this was the last visit he found he should make to the Otan; he therefore urged Aboan to make the best of this last effort, and to explain himself so to Onahal that she, deferring her enjoyment of her young lover no longer, might make way for the Prince to speak to Imoinda.

The whole affair being agreed on between the Prince and Aboan, they attended the King, as the custom was, to the Otan, where, while the whole company was taken up in beholding the dancing and antic postures the women-royal made to divert the King, Onahal singled out Aboan, whom she found most pliable to her wish. When she had him where she believed she could not be heard, she sighed to him, and softly cried, "Ah, Aboan! When will you be sensible of my passion? I confess it with my mouth, because I would not give my eyes the lie; and you have but too much already perceived they have confessed my flame. Nor would I have you believe that because I am the abandoned mistress of a king, I esteem myself altogether divested of charms. No, Aboan; I have still a rest<sup>9</sup> of beauty enough engaging, and have learned to please too well not to be desirable. I can have lovers still, but will have none but Aboan." "Madam," replied the half-feigning youth, "you have already, by my eyes, found you can still conquer, and I believe 'tis in pity of me you condescend to this kind confession. But, Madam, words are used to be so small a part of our country courtship, that 'tis rare one can get so happy an opportunity as to tell one's heart, and those few minutes we have are forced to be snatched for more certain proofs of love than speaking and sighing; and such I languish for."

He spoke this with such a tone that she hoped it true, and could not forbear believing it; and being wholly transported with joy, for having subdued the finest of all the King's subjects to her desires, she took from her ears two large pearls and commanded him to wear 'em in his. He would have refused 'em, crying, "Madam, these are not the proofs of your love that I expect; 'tis opportunity, 'tis a

lone hour only, that can make me happy." But forcing the pearls into his hand, she whispered softly to him, "Oh! Do not fear a woman's invention, when love sets her a-thinking." And pressing his hand, she cried, "This night you shall be happy. Come to the gate of the orange groves behind the Otan, and I will be ready, about midnight, to receive you." 'Twas thus agreed, and she left him, that no notice might be taken of their speaking together.

The ladies were still dancing, and the King, laid on a carpet, with a great deal of pleasure was beholding them, especially Imoinda, who that day appeared more lovely than ever, being enlivened with the good tidings Onahal had brought her of the constant passion the Prince had for her. The Prince was laid on another carpet at the other end of the room, with his eyes fixed on the object of his soul; and as she turned or moved, so did they, and she alone gave his eyes and soul their motions. Nor did Imoinda employ her eyes to any other use than in beholding with infinite pleasure the joy she produced in those of the Prince. But while she was more regarding him than the steps she took, she chanced to fall, and so near him as that, leaping with extreme force from the carpet, he caught her in his arms as she fell; and 'twas visible to the whole presence<sup>1</sup> the joy wherewith he received her. He clasped her close to his bosom, and quite forgot that reverence that was due to the mistress of a king, and that punishment that is the reward of a boldness of this nature; and had not the presence of mind of Imoinda (fonder of his safety than her own) befriended him, in making her spring from his arms and fall into her dance again, he had at that instant met his death; for the old king, jealous to the last degree, rose up in rage, broke all the diversion, and led Imoinda to her apartment, and sent out word to the Prince to go immediately to the camp, and that if he were found another night in court he should suffer the death ordained for disobedient offenders.

You may imagine how welcome this news was to Oroonoko, whose unseasonable transport and caress of Imoinda was blamed by all men that loved him; and now he perceived his fault, yet cried that for such another moment, he would be content to die.

All the Otan was in disorder about this accident; and Onahal was particularly concerned, because on the Prince's stay depended her happiness, for she could no longer expect that of Aboan. So that ere they departed, they contrived it so that the Prince and he should come both that night to the grove of the Otan, which was all of oranges and citrons, and that there they should wait her orders.

They parted thus, with grief enough, till night, leaving the King in possession of the lovely maid. But nothing could appease the jealousy of the old lover. He would not be imposed on, but would have it that Imoinda made a false step on purpose to fall into Oroonoko's bosom, and that all things looked like a design on both sides; and 'twas in vain she protested her innocence. He was old and obstinate, and left her more than half assured that his fear was true.

The King going to his apartment sent to know where the Prince was, and if he intended to obey his command. The messenger returned and told him, he found the Prince pensive and altogether unpreparing for the campaign, that he lay negligently on the ground, and answered very little. This confirmed the jealousy of the King, and he commanded that they should very narrowly and privately watch his motions, and that he should not stir from his apartment but one spy or other should be employed to watch him. So that the hour approaching wherein he was to go to the citron grove, and taking only Aboan along with him, he leaves his apartment, and was watched to the very gate of the Otan, where he was seen to enter, and where they left him, to carry back the tidings to the King.

Oroonoko and Aboan were no sooner entered but Onahal led the Prince to the apartment of Imoinda, who, not knowing anything of her happiness, was laid in bed. But Onahal only left him in her chamber, to make the best of his opportunity, and took her dear Aboan to her own, where he showed the height of complaisance for his prince, when, to give him an opportunity, he suffered himself to be caressed in bed by Onahal.

The Prince softly wakened Imoinda, who was not a little surprised with joy to find him there; and yet she trembled with a thousand fears. I believe he omitted saying nothing to this young maid that

might persuade her to suffer him to seize his own, and take the rights of love; and I believe she was not long resisting those arms where she so longed to be; and having opportunity, night and silence, youth, love and desire, he soon prevailed, and ravished in a moment what his old grandfather had been endeavoring for so many months.

'Tis not to be imagined the satisfaction of these two young lovers; nor the vows she made him that she remained a spotless maid till that night, and that what she did with his grandfather had robbed him of no part of her virgin honor, the gods in mercy and justice having reserved that for her plighted lord, to whom of right it belonged. And 'tis impossible to express the transports he suffered, while he listened to a discourse so charming from her loved lips, and clasped that body in his arms for whom he had so long languished; and nothing now afflicted him but his sudden departure from her; for he told her the necessity and his commands, but should depart satisfied in this, that since the old king had hitherto not been able to deprive him of those enjoyments which only belonged to him, he believed for the future he would be less able to injure him; so that abating the scandal of the veil, which was no otherwise so than that she was wife to another, he believed her safe, even in the arms of the King, and innocent; yet would he have ventured at the conquest of the world, and have given it all, to have had her avoided that honor of receiving the royal veil. 'Twas thus, between a thousand caresses, that both bemoaned the hard fate of youth and beauty, so liable to that cruel promotion. 'Twas a glory that could well have been spared here, though desired and aimed at by all the young females of that kingdom.

But while they were thus fondly employed, forgetting how time ran on, and that the dawn must conduct him far away from his only happiness, they heard a great noise in the Otan, and unusual voices of men; at which the Prince, starting from the arms of the frightened Imoinda, ran to a little battle-ax he used to wear by his side, and having not so much leisure as to put on his habit, he opposed himself against some who were already opening the door; which they did with so much violence that Oroonoko was not able to

defend it, but was forced to cry out with a commanding voice, "Whoever ye are that have the boldness to attempt to approach this apartment thus rudely, know that I, the Prince Oroonoko, will revenge it with the certain death of him that first enters. Therefore stand back, and know, this place is sacred to love and me this night; tomorrow 'tis the King's."

This he spoke with a voice so resolved and assured that they soon retired from the door, but cried, "'Tis by the King's command we are come; and being satisfied by thy voice, O Prince, as much as if we had entered, we can report to the King the truth of all his fears, and leave thee to provide for thy own safety, as thou art advised by thy friends."

At these words they departed, and left the Prince to take a short and sad leave of his Imoinda, who, trusting in the strength of her charms, believed she should appease the fury of a jealous king by saying she was surprised, and that it was by force of arms he got into her apartment. All her concern now was for his life, and therefore she hastened him to the camp, and with much ado prevailed on him to go. Nor was it she alone that prevailed; Aboan and Onahal both pleaded, and both assured him of a lie that should be well enough contrived to secure Imoinda. So that at last, with a heart sad as death, dying eyes, and sighing soul, Oroonoko departed and took his way to the camp.

It was not long after the King in person came to the Otan, where, beholding Imoinda with rage in his eyes, he upbraided her wickedness and perfidy, and threatening her royal lover, she fell on her face at his feet, bedewing the floor with her tears and imploring his pardon for a fault which she had not with her will committed, as Onahal, who was also prostrate with her, could testify; that unknown to her, he had broke into her apartment, and ravished her. She spoke this much against her conscience, but to save her own life 'twas absolutely necessary she should feign this falsity. She knew it could not injure the Prince, he being fled to an army that would stand by him against any injuries that should assault him. However, this last thought of Imoinda's being ravished changed the measures of his

revenge; and whereas before he designed to be himself her executioner, he now resolved she should not die. But as it is the greatest crime in nature amongst 'em to touch a woman after having been possessed by a son, a father, or a brother, so now he looked on Imoinda as a polluted thing, wholly unfit for his embrace; nor would he resign her to his grandson, because she had received the royal veil. He therefore removes her from the Otan, with Onahal; whom he put into safe hands, with order they should be both sold off as slaves to another country, either Christian or heathen; 'twas no matter where.

This cruel sentence, worse than death, they implored might be reversed; but their prayers were vain, and it was put in execution accordingly, and that with so much secrecy that none, either without or within the Otan, knew anything of their absence or their destiny.

The old king, nevertheless, executed this with a great deal of reluctancy; but he believed he had made a very great conquest over himself, when he had once resolved, and had performed what he resolved. He believed now that his love had been unjust, and that he could not expect the gods, or Captain of the Clouds (as they call the unknown power), should suffer a better consequence from so ill a cause. He now begins to hold Oroonoko excused, and to say he had reason for what he did. And now everybody could assure the King how passionately Imoinda was beloved by the Prince; even those confessed it now, who said the contrary before his flame was abated. So that the King being old, and not able to defend himself in war, and having no sons of all his race remaining alive but only this, to maintain him on his throne; and looking on this as a man disoblighd, first by the rape of his mistress, or rather wife; and now by depriving of him wholly of her, he feared, might make him desperate and do some cruel thing, either to himself or his old grandfather, the offender: he began to repent him extremely of the contempt he had, in his rage, put on Imoinda. Besides, he considered he ought in honor to have killed her for this offense, if it had been one. He ought to have had so much value and consideration for a maid of her quality as to have nobly put her to death, and not to have sold her like a common slave, the greatest revenge and the most disgraceful

of any; and to which they a thousand times prefer death, and implore it, as Imoinda did, but could not obtain that honor. Seeing therefore it was certain that Oroonoko would highly resent this affront, he thought good to make some excuse for his rashness to him; and to that end he sent a messenger to the camp, with orders to treat with him about the matter, to gain his pardon, and to endeavor to mitigate his grief; but that by no means he should tell him she was sold, but secretly put to death, for he knew he should never obtain his pardon for the other.

When the messenger came, he found the Prince upon the point of engaging with the enemy; but as soon as he heard of the arrival of the messenger, he commanded him to his tent, where he embraced him and received him with joy; which was soon abated by the downcast looks of the messenger, who was instantly demanded the cause by Oroonoko, who, impatient of delay, asked a thousand questions in a breath, and all concerning Imoinda. But there needed little return, for he could almost answer himself of all he demanded, from his sighs and eyes. At last, the messenger casting himself at the Prince's feet, and kissing them with all the submission of a man that had something to implore which he dreaded to utter, he besought him to hear with calmness what he had to deliver to him, and to call up all his noble and heroic courage to encounter with his words, and defend himself against the ungrateful<sup>2</sup> things he must relate. Oroonoko replied, with a deep sigh and a languishing voice, "I am armed against their worst efforts—; for I know they will tell me, Imoinda is no more—and after that, you may spare the rest." Then, commanding him to rise, he laid himself on a carpet, under a rich pavilion, and remained a good while silent, and was hardly heard to sigh. When he was come a little to himself, the messenger asked him leave to deliver that part of his embassy which the Prince had not yet divined. And the Prince cried, "I permit thee—." Then he told him the affliction the old king was in, for the rashness he had committed in his cruelty to Imoinda; and how he deigned to ask pardon for his offense, and to implore the Prince would not suffer that loss to touch his heart too sensibly, which now all the gods could not restore him,

but might recompense him in glory, which he begged he would pursue; and that Death, that common revenger of all injuries, would soon even the account between him and a feeble old man.

Oroonoko bade him return his duty to his lord and master, and to assure him, there was no account of revenge to be adjusted between them; if there were, 'twas he was the aggressor, and that Death would be just and, maugre<sup>3</sup> his age, would see him righted; and he was contented to leave his share of glory to youths more fortunate and worthy of that favor from the gods. That henceforth he would never lift a weapon or draw a bow, but abandon the small remains of his life to sighs and tears, and the continual thoughts of what his lord and grandfather had thought good to send out of the world, with all that youth, that innocence, and beauty.

After having spoken this, whatever his greatest officers and men of the best rank could do, they could not raise him from the carpet, or persuade him to action and resolutions of life; but commanding all to retire, he shut himself into his pavilion all that day, while the enemy was ready to engage; and wondering at the delay, the whole body of the chief of the army then addressed themselves to him, and to whom they had much ado to get admittance. They fell on their faces at the foot of his carpet, where they lay and besought him with earnest prayers and tears to lead 'em forth to battle, and not let the enemy take advantages of them; and implored him to have regard to his glory, and to the world, that depended on his courage and conduct. But he made no other reply to all their supplications but this, that he had now no more business for glory; and for the world, it was a trifle not worth his care. "Go," continued he, sighing, "and divide it amongst you; and reap with joy what you so vainly prize, and leave me to my more welcome destiny."

They then demanded what they should do, and whom he would constitute in his room, that the confusion of ambitious youth and power might not ruin their order and make them a prey to the enemy. He replied, he would not give himself the trouble—; but wished 'em to choose the bravest man amongst 'em, let his quality or birth be what it would. "For, O my friends!" said he, "it is not titles



make men brave or good, or birth that bestows courage and generosity, or makes the owner happy. Believe this, when you behold Oroonoko, the most wretched and abandoned by fortune of all the creation of the gods." So turning himself about, he would make no more reply to all they could urge or implore.

The army, beholding their officers return unsuccessful, with sad faces and ominous looks that presaged no good luck, suffered a thousand fears to take possession of their hearts, and the enemy to come even upon 'em, before they would provide for their safety by any defense; and though they were assured by some, who had a mind to animate 'em, that they should be immediately headed by the Prince, and that in the meantime Aboan had orders to command as general, yet they were so dismayed for want of that great example of bravery that they could make but a very feeble resistance; and at last downright fled before the enemy, who pursued 'em to the very tents, killing 'em. Nor could all Aboan's courage, which that day gained him immortal glory, shame 'em into a manly defense of themselves. The guards that were left behind about the Prince's tent, seeing the soldiers flee before the enemy and scatter themselves all over the plain, in great disorder, made such outcries as roused the Prince from his amorous slumber, in which he had remained buried for two days without permitting any sustenance to approach him. But in spite of all his resolutions, he had not the constancy of grief to that degree, as to make him insensible of the danger of his army; and in that instant he leaped from his couch and cried, "—Come, if we must die, let us meet Death the noblest way; and 'twill be more like Oroonoko to encounter him at an army's head, opposing the torrent of a conquering foe, than lazily on a couch to wait his lingering pleasure, and die every moment by a thousand wrecking<sup>4</sup> thoughts; or be tamely taken by an enemy, and led a whining, lovesick slave to adorn the triumphs of Jamoan, that young victor, who already is entered beyond the limits I had prescribed him."

While he was speaking, he suffered his people to dress him for the field, and sallying out of his pavilion, with more life and vigor in his countenance than ever he showed, he appeared like some divine

power descended to save his country from destruction; and his people had purposely put on him all things that might make him shine with most splendor, to strike a reverend awe into the beholders. He flew into the thickest of those that were pursuing his men, and being animated with despair, he fought as if he came on purpose to die, and did such things as will not be believed that human strength could perform, and such as soon inspired all the rest with new courage and new order. And now it was that they began to fight indeed, and so as if they would not be outdone even by their adored hero; who, turning the tide of the victory, changing absolutely the fate of the day, gained an entire conquest; and Oroonoko having the good fortune to single out Jamoan, he took him prisoner with his own hand, having wounded him almost to death.

This Jamoan afterwards became very dear to him, being a man very gallant and of excellent graces and fine parts; so that he never put him amongst the rank of captives, as they used to do, without distinction, for the common sale or market; but kept him in his own court, where he retained nothing of the prisoner but the name, and returned no more into his own country, so great an affection he took for Oroonoko; and by a thousand tales and adventures of love and gallantry flattered<sup>5</sup> his disease of melancholy and languishment, which I have often heard him say had certainly killed him, but for the conversation of this prince and Aboan, and the French governor he had from his childhood, of whom I have spoken before, and who was a man of admirable wit, great ingenuity and learning, all which he had infused into his young pupil. This Frenchman was banished out of his own country for some heretical notions he held, and though he was a man of very little religion, he had admirable morals and a brave soul.

After the total defeat of Jamoan's army, which all fled, or were left dead upon the place, they spent some time in the camp, Oroonoko choosing rather to remain a while there in his tents than enter into a palace or live in a court where he had so lately suffered so great a loss. The officers, therefore, who saw and knew his cause of discontent, invented all sorts of diversions and sports to entertain

their prince; so that what with those amusements abroad and others at home, that is, within their tents, with the persuasions, arguments, and care of his friends and servants that he more peculiarly prized, he wore off in time a great part of that chagrin and torture of despair which the first efforts of Imoinda's death had given him. Insomuch as having received a thousand kind embassies from the King, and invitations to return to court, he obeyed, though with no little reluctance; and when he did so, there was a visible change in him, and for a long time he was much more melancholy than before. But time lessens all extremes, and reduces 'em to mediums and unconcern; but no motives or beauties, though all endeavored it, could engage him in any sort of amour, though he had all the invitations to it, both from his own youth and others' ambitions and designs.

Oroonoko was no sooner returned from this last conquest, and received at court with all the joy and magnificence that could be expressed to a young victor, who was not only returned triumphant but beloved like a deity, when there arrived in the port an English ship.

This person<sup>6</sup> had often before been in these countries and was very well known to Oroonoko, with whom he had trafficked for slaves, and had used to do the same with his predecessors.

This commander was a man of a finer sort of address and conversation, better bred and more engaging than most of that sort of men are, so that he seemed rather never to have been bred out of a court than almost all his life at sea. This captain therefore was always better received at court than most of the traders to those countries were; and especially by Oroonoko, who was more civilized, according to the European mode, than any other had been, and took more delight in the white nations, and above all men of parts and wit. To this captain he sold abundance of his slaves, and for the favor and esteem he had for him, made him many presents, and obliged him to stay at court as long as possibly he could. Which the captain seemed to take as a very great honor done him, entertaining the Prince every day with globes and maps, and mathematical discourses

and instruments; eating, drinking, hunting, and living with him with so much familiarity that it was not to be doubted but he had gained very greatly upon the heart of this gallant young man. And the captain, in return of all these mighty favors, besought the Prince to honor his vessel with his presence, some day or other, to dinner, before he should set sail; which he condescended to accept, and appointed his day. The captain, on his part, failed not to have all things in a readiness, in the most magnificent order he could possibly. And the day being come, the captain in his boat, richly adorned with carpets and velvet cushions, rowed to the shore to receive the Prince, with another longboat where was placed all his music and trumpets, with which Oroonoko was extremely delighted; who met him on the shore attended by his French governor, Jamoan, Aboan, and about a hundred of the noblest of the youths of the court. And after they had first carried the Prince on board, the boats fetched the rest off; where they found a very splendid treat, with all sorts of fine wines, and were as well entertained as 'twas possible in such a place to be.

The Prince, having drunk hard of punch and several sorts of wine, as did all the rest (for great care was taken they should want nothing of that part of the entertainment), was very merry, and in great admiration of the ship, for he had never been in one before; so that he was curious of beholding every place where he decently might descend. The rest, no less curious, who were not quite overcome with drinking, rambled at their pleasure fore and aft, as their fancies guided 'em. So that the captain, who had well laid his design before, gave the word, and seized on all his guests; they clapping great irons suddenly on the Prince, when he was leaped down in the hold to view that part of the vessel, and locking him fast down, secured him. The same treachery was used to all the rest; and all in one instant, in several places of the ship, were lashed fast in irons, and betrayed to slavery. That great design over, they set all hands to work to hoise<sup>z</sup> sail; and with as treacherous and fair a wind, they made from the shore with this innocent and glorious prize, who thought of nothing less than such an entertainment.

Some have commended this act as brave in the captain; but I will spare my sense of it, and leave it to my reader to judge as he pleases.

It may be easily guessed in what manner the Prince resented this indignity, who may be best resembled to a lion taken in a toil; so he raged, so he struggled for liberty, but all in vain; and they had so wisely managed his fetters that he could not use a hand in his defense, to quit himself of a life that would by no means endure slavery, nor could he move from the place where he was tied to any solid part of the ship, against which he might have beat his head, and have finished his disgrace that way. So that being deprived of all other means, he resolved to perish for want of food. And pleased at last with that thought, and toiled and tired by rage and indignation, he laid himself down, and sullenly resolved upon dying, and refused all things that were brought him.

This did not a little vex the captain, and the more so because he found almost all of 'em of the same humor; so that the loss of so many brave slaves, so tall and goodly to behold, would have been very considerable. He therefore ordered one to go from him (for he would not be seen himself) to Oroonoko, and to assure him he was afflicted for having rashly done so unhospitable a deed, and which could not be now remedied, since they were far from shore; but since he resented it in so high a nature, he assured him he would revoke his resolution, and set both him and his friends ashore on the next land they should touch at; and of this the messenger gave him his oath, provided he would resolve to live. And Oroonoko, whose honor was such as he never had violated a word in his life himself, much less a solemn asseveration, believed in an instant what this man said, but replied, he expected for a confirmation of this to have his shameful fetters dismissed. This demand was carried to the captain, who returned him answer that the offense had been so great which he had put upon the Prince that he durst not trust him with liberty while he remained in the ship, for fear lest by a valor natural to him, and a revenge that would animate that valor, he might commit some outrage fatal to himself and the King his master, to whom his vessel did belong. To this Oroonoko replied, he would

engage his honor to behave himself in all friendly order and manner, and obey the command of the captain, as he was lord of the King's vessel and general of those men under his command.

This was delivered to the still doubting captain, who could not resolve to trust a heathen, he said, upon his parole,<sup>8</sup> a man that had no sense or notion of the God that he worshipped. Oroonoko then replied, he was very sorry to hear that the captain pretended to the knowledge and worship of any gods who had taught him no better principles than not to credit as he would be credited; but they told him the difference of their faith occasioned that distrust. For the captain had protested to him upon the word of a Christian, and sworn in the name of a great god, which if he should violate, he would expect eternal torment in the world to come. "Is that all the obligation he has to be just to his oath?" replied Oroonoko. "Let him know I swear by my honor; which to violate, would not only render me contemptible and despised by all brave and honest men, and so give myself perpetual pain, but it would be eternally offending and diseasing all mankind, harming, betraying, circumventing and outraging all men; but punishments hereafter are suffered by one's self, and the world takes no cognizances whether this god have revenged 'em or not, 'tis done so secretly and deferred so long. While the man of no honor suffers every moment the scorn and contempt of the honester world, and dies every day ignominiously in his fame, which is more valuable than life. I speak not this to move belief, but to show you how you mistake, when you imagine that he who will violate his honor will keep his word with his gods." So turning from him with a disdainful smile, he refused to answer him, when he urged him to know what answer he should carry back to his captain; so that he departed without saying any more.

The captain pondering and consulting what to do, it was concluded that nothing but Oroonoko's liberty would encourage any of the rest to eat, except the Frenchman, whom the captain could not pretend to keep prisoner, but only told him he was secured because he might act something in favor of the Prince, but that he should be freed as soon as they came to land. So that they

concluded it wholly necessary to free the Prince from his irons, that he might show himself to the rest; that they might have an eye upon him, and that they could not fear a single man.

This being resolved, to make the obligation the greater, the captain himself went to Oroonoko; where after many compliments, and assurances of what he had already promised, he receiving from the Prince his parole and his hand for his good behavior, dismissed his irons and brought him to his own cabin; where after having treated and reposed him a while, for he had neither eat<sup>9</sup> nor slept in four days before, he besought him to visit those obstinate people in chains, who refused all manner of sustenance, and entreated him to oblige 'em to eat, and assure 'em of their liberty the first opportunity.

Oroonoko, who was too generous not to give credit to his words, showed himself to his people, who were transported with excess of joy at the sight of their darling prince, falling at his feet and kissing and embracing 'em, believing, as some divine oracle, all he assured 'em. But he besought 'em to bear their chains with that bravery that became those whom he had seen act so nobly in arms; and that they could not give him greater proofs of their love and friendship, since 'twas all the security the captain (his friend) could have, against the revenge, he said, they might possibly justly take for the injuries sustained by him. And they all with one accord assured him, they could not suffer enough, when it was for his repose and safety.

After this they no longer refused to eat, but took what was brought 'em, and were pleased with their captivity, since by it they hoped to redeem the Prince, who, all the rest of the voyage, was treated with all the respect due to his birth, though nothing could divert his melancholy; and he would often sigh for Imoinda, and think this a punishment due to his misfortune, in having left that noble maid behind him that fatal night, in the Otan, when he fled to the camp.

Possessed with a thousand thoughts of past joys with this fair young person, and a thousand griefs for her eternal loss, he endured a tedious voyage, and at last arrived at the mouth of the river of Surinam, a colony belonging to the King of England, and where they



were to deliver some part of their slaves. There the merchants and gentlemen of the country going on board to demand those lots of slaves they had already agreed on, and, amongst those, the overseers of those plantations where I then chanced to be, the captain, who had given the word, ordered his men to bring up those noble slaves in fetters whom I have spoken of; and having put 'em some in one and some in other lots, with women and children (which they call pickaninnies), they sold 'em off as slaves to several merchants and gentlemen; not putting any two in one lot, because they would separate 'em far from each other, not daring to trust 'em together, lest rage and courage should put 'em upon contriving some great action, to the ruin of the colony.

Oroonoko was first seized on, and sold to our overseer, who had the first lot, with seventeen more of all sorts and sizes, but not one of quality with him. When he saw this, he found what they meant, for, as I said, he understood English pretty well; and being wholly unarmed and defenseless, so as it was in vain to make any resistance, he only beheld the captain with a look all fierce and disdainful, upbraiding him with eyes that forced blushes on his guilty cheeks; he only cried, in passing over the side of the ship, "Farewell, sir. 'Tis worth my suffering, to gain so true a knowledge both of you and of your gods by whom you swear." And desiring those that held him to forbear their pains, and telling 'em he would make no resistance, he cried, "Come, my fellow slaves; let us descend, and see if we can meet with more honor and honesty in the next world we shall touch upon." So he nimbly leaped into the boat, and showing no more concern, suffered himself to be rowed up the river with his seventeen companions.

The gentleman that bought him was a young Cornish gentleman whose name was Trefry, a man of great wit and fine learning, and was carried into those parts by the Lord —, Governor,<sup>1</sup> to manage all his affairs. He reflecting on the last words of Oroonoko to the captain, and beholding the richness of his vest,<sup>2</sup> no sooner came into the boat but he fixed his eyes on him; and finding something so extraordinary in his face, his shape and mien, a greatness of look



and haughtiness in his air, and finding he spoke English, had a great mind to be inquiring into his quality and fortune; which, though Oroonoko endeavored to hide, by only confessing he was above the rank of common slaves, Trefry soon found he was yet something greater than he confessed, and from that moment began to conceive so vast an esteem for him that he ever after loved him as his dearest brother, and showed him all the civilities due to so great a man.

Trefry was a very good mathematician and a linguist, could speak French and Spanish; and in the three days they remained in the boat (for so long were they going from the ship to the plantation) he entertained Oroonoko so agreeably with his art and discourse, that he was no less pleased with Trefry than he was with the Prince; and he thought himself at least fortunate in this, that since he was a slave, as long as he would suffer himself to remain so, he had a man of so excellent wit and parts for a master. So that before they had finished their voyage up the river, he made no scruple of declaring to Trefry all his fortunes, and most part of what I have here related, and put himself wholly into the hands of his new friend, whom he found resenting all the injuries were done him, and was charmed with all the greatness of his actions; which were recited with that modesty and delicate sense as wholly vanquished him, and subdued him to his interest. And he promised him on his word and honor, he would find the means to reconduct him to his own country again, assuring him, he had a perfect abhorrence of so dishonorable an action, and that he would sooner have died than have been the author of such a perfidy. He found the Prince was very much concerned to know what became of his friends, and how they took their slavery; and Trefry promised to take care about the inquiring after their condition, and that he should have an account of 'em.

Though, as Oroonoko afterwards said, he had little reason to credit the words of a *backearary*,<sup>3</sup> yet he knew not why, but he saw a kind of sincerity and awful truth in the face of Trefry; he saw an honesty in his eyes, and he found him wise and witty enough to understand honor; for it was one of his maxims, a man of wit could not be a knave or villain.

In their passage up the river they put in at several houses for refreshment, and ever when they landed, numbers of people would flock to behold this man; not but their eyes were daily entertained with the sight of slaves, but the fame of Oroonoko was gone before him, and all people were in admiration of his beauty. Besides, he had a rich habit on, in which he was taken, so different from the rest, and which the captain could not strip him of, because he was forced to surprise his person in the minute he sold him. When he found his habit made him liable, as he thought, to be gazed at the more, he begged Trefry to give him something more befitting a slave, which he did, and took off his robes. Nevertheless, he shone through all; and his osenbrigs (a sort of brown holland<sup>4</sup> suit he had on) could not conceal the graces of his looks and mien, and he had no less admirers than when he had his dazzling habit on. The royal youth appeared in spite of the slave, and people could not help treating him after a different manner, without designing it. As soon as they approached him, they venerated and esteemed him; his eyes insensibly commanded respect, and his behavior insinuated it into every soul. So that there was nothing talked of but this young and gallant slave, even by those who yet knew not that he was a prince.

I ought to tell you that the Christians never buy any slaves but they give 'em some name of their own, their native ones being likely very barbarous and hard to pronounce; so that Mr. Trefry gave Oroonoko that of Caesar, which name will live in that country as long as that (scarce more) glorious one of the great Roman; for 'tis most evident, he wanted<sup>5</sup> no part of the personal courage of that Caesar, and acted things as memorable, had they been done in some part of the world replenished with people and historians that might have given him his due. But his misfortune was to fall in an obscure world, that afforded only a female pen to celebrate his fame; though I doubt not but it had lived from others' endeavors, if the Dutch, who immediately after his time took that country,<sup>6</sup> had not killed, banished, and dispersed all those that were capable of giving the world this great man's life, much better than I have done. And Mr.

Trefry, who designed it, died before he began it, and bemoaned himself for not having undertook it in time.

For the future, therefore, I must call Oroonoko Caesar, since by that name only he was known in our western world, and by that name he was received on shore at Parham House, where he was destined a slave. But if the King himself (God bless him) had come ashore, there could not have been greater expectations by all the whole plantation, and those neighboring ones, than was on ours at that time; and he was received more like a governor than a slave. Notwithstanding, as the custom was, they assigned him his portion of land, his house, and his business, up in the plantation. But as it was more for form than any design to put him to his task, he endured no more of the slave but the name, and remained some days in the house, receiving all visits that were made him, without stirring towards that part of the plantation where the Negroes were.

At last he would needs go view his land, his house, and the business assigned him. But he no sooner came to the houses of the slaves, which are like a little town by itself, the Negroes all having left work, but they all came forth to behold him, and found he was that prince who had, at several times, sold most of 'em to these parts; and from a veneration they pay to great men, especially if they know 'em, and from the surprise and awe they had at the sight of him, they all cast themselves at his feet, crying out in their language, "Live, O King! Long live, O King!" and kissing his feet, paid him even divine homage.

Several English gentlemen were with him; and what Mr. Trefry had told 'em was here confirmed, of which he himself before had no other witness than Caesar himself. But he was infinitely glad to find his grandeur confirmed by the adoration of all the slaves.

Caesar, troubled with their over-joy and over-ceremony, besought 'em to rise and to receive him as their fellow slave, assuring them he was no better. At which they set up with one accord a most terrible and hideous mourning and condoling, which he and the English had much ado to appease; but at last they prevailed with 'em, and they prepared all their barbarous music, and everyone killed and dressed

something of his own stock (for every family has their land apart, on which, at their leisure times, they breed all eatable things), and clubbing it together,<sup>7</sup> made a most magnificent supper, inviting their *Grandee Captain*, their prince, to honor it with his presence; which he did, and several English with him; where they all waited on him, some playing, others dancing before him all the time, according to the manners of their several nations, and with unwearied industry endeavoring to please and delight him.

While they sat at meat Mr. Trefry told Caesar that most of these young slaves were undone in love with a fine she-slave, whom they had had about six months on their land. The Prince, who never heard the name of love without a sigh, nor any mention of it without the curiosity of examining further into that tale, which of all discourses was most agreeable to him, asked how they came to be so unhappy as to be all undone for one fair slave. Trefry, who was naturally amorous and loved to talk of love as well as anybody, proceeded to tell him, they had the most charming black that ever was beheld on their plantation, about fifteen or sixteen years old, as he guessed; that for his part, he had done nothing but sigh for her ever since she came, and that all the white beauties he had seen never charmed him so absolutely as this fine creature had done; and that no man, of any nation, ever beheld her that did not fall in love with her; and that she had all the slaves perpetually at her feet, and the whole country resounded with the fame of Clemene, “for so,” said he, “we have christened her. But she denies us all with such a noble disdain, that ’tis a miracle to see that she, who can give such eternal desires, should herself be all ice and all unconcern. She is adorned with the most graceful modesty that ever beautified youth; the softest sigher—that, if she were capable of love, one would swear she languished for some absent happy man; and so retired, as if she feared a rape even from the god of day,<sup>8</sup> or that the breezes would steal kisses from her delicate mouth. Her task of work some sighing lover every day makes it his petition to perform for her, which she accepts blushing and with reluctance, for fear he will ask her a look for a recompense, which he dares not presume to hope, so

great an awe she strikes into the hearts of her admirers." "I do not wonder," replied the Prince, "that Clemene should refuse slaves, being as you say so beautiful, but wonder how she escapes those who can entertain her as you can do; or why, being your slave, you do not oblige her to yield." "I confess," said Trefry, "when I have, against her will, entertained her with love so long as to be transported with my passion, even above decency, I have been ready to make use of those advantages of strength and force nature has given me. But oh! she disarms me with that modesty and weeping, so tender and so moving that I retire, and thank my stars she overcame me." The company laughed at his civility to a slave, and Caesar only applauded the nobleness of his passion and nature, since that slave might be noble or, what was better, have true notions of honor and virtue in her. Thus passed they this night, after having received from the slaves all imaginable respect and obedience.

The next day Trefry asked Caesar to walk, when the heat was allayed, and designedly carried him by the cottage of the fair slave, and told him she whom he spoke of last night lived there retired. "But," says he, "I would not wish you to approach, for I am sure you will be in love as soon as you behold her." Caesar assured him he was proof against all the charms of that sex, and that if he imagined his heart could be so perfidious to love again, after Imoinda, he believed he should tear it from his bosom. They had no sooner spoke, but a little shock dog<sup>9</sup> that Clemene had presented her, which she took great delight in, ran out; and she, not knowing anybody was there, ran to get it in again, and bolted out on those who were just speaking of her. When seeing them, she would have run in again, but Trefry caught her by the hand and cried, "Clemene, however you fly a lover, you ought to pay some respect to this stranger" (pointing to Caesar). But she, as if she had resolved never to raise her eyes to the face of a man again, bent 'em the more to the earth when he spoke, and gave the Prince the leisure to look the more at her. There needed no long gazing or consideration to examine who this fair creature was; he soon saw Imoinda all over

her; in a minute he saw her face, her shape, her air, her modesty, and all that called forth his soul with joy at his eyes, and left his body destitute of almost life; it stood without motion, and for a minute knew not that it had a being; and I believe he had never come to himself, so oppressed he was with over-joy, if he had not met with this allay, that he perceived Imoinda fall dead in the hands of Trefry. This awakened him, and he ran to her aid and caught her in his arms, where by degrees she came to herself; and 'tis needless to tell with what transports, what ecstasies of joy, they both a while beheld each other, without speaking; then snatched each other to their arms; then gaze again, as if they still doubted whether they possessed the blessing they grasped; but when they recovered their speech, 'tis not to be imagined what tender things they expressed to each other, wondering what strange fate had brought 'em again together. They soon informed each other of their fortunes, and equally bewailed their fate; but at the same time they mutually protested that even fetters and slavery were soft and easy, and would be supported with joy and pleasure, while they could be so happy to possess each other and to be able to make good their vows. Caesar swore he disdained the empire of the world while he could behold his Imoinda; and she despised grandeur and pomp, those vanities of her sex, when she could gaze on Oroonoko. He adored the very cottage where she resided, and said that little inch of the world would give him more happiness than all the universe could do; and she vowed it was a palace, while adorned with the presence of Oroonoko.

Trefry was infinitely pleased with this novel,<sup>1</sup> and found this Clemene was the fair mistress of whom Caesar had before spoke; and was not a little satisfied that heaven was so kind to the Prince as to sweeten his misfortunes by so lucky an accident; and leaving the lovers to themselves, was impatient to come down to Parham House (which was on the same plantation) to give me an account of what had happened. I was as impatient to make these lovers a visit, having already made a friendship with Caesar, and from his own mouth learned what I have related; which was confirmed by his

Frenchman, who was set on shore to seek his fortunes, and of whom they could not make a slave, because a Christian, and he came daily to Parham Hill to see and pay his respects to his pupil prince. So that concerning and interesting myself in all that related to Caesar, whom I had assured of liberty as soon as the Governor arrived, I hasted presently to the place where the lovers were, and was infinitely glad to find this beautiful young slave (who had already gained all our esteems, for her modesty and her extraordinary prettiness) to be the same I had heard Caesar speak so much of. One may imagine then we paid her a treble respect; and though, from her being carved in fine flowers and birds all over her body, we took her to be of quality before, yet when we knew Clemene was Imoinda, we could not enough admire her.

I had forgot to tell you that those who are nobly born of that country are so delicately cut and rased<sup>2</sup> all over the forepart of the trunk of their bodies, that it looks as if it were japanned, the works being raised like high point round the edges of the flowers. Some are only carved with a little flower or bird at the sides of the temples, as was Caesar; and those who are so carved over the body resemble our ancient Picts,<sup>3</sup> that are figured in the chronicles, but these carvings are more delicate.

From that happy day Caesar took Clemene for his wife, to the general joy of all people; and there was as much magnificence as the country would afford at the celebration of this wedding: and in a very short time after she conceived with child, which made Caesar even adore her, knowing he was the last of his great race. This new accident made him more impatient of liberty, and he was every day treating with Trefry for his and Clemene's liberty, and offered either gold or a vast quantity of slaves, which should be paid before they let him go, provided he could have any security that he should go when his ransom was paid. They fed him from day to day with promises, and delayed him till the Lord Governor should come; so that he began to suspect them of falsehood, and that they would delay him till the time of his wife's delivery and make a slave of that too, for all the breed is theirs to whom the parents belong. This



thought made him very uneasy, and his sullenness gave them some jealousies<sup>4</sup> of him; so that I was obliged, by some persons who feared a mutiny (which is very fatal sometimes in those colonies, that abound so with slaves that they exceed the whites in vast numbers), to discourse with Caesar, and to give him all the satisfaction I possibly could; they knew he and Clemene were scarce an hour in a day from my lodgings, that they eat with me, and that I obliged 'em in all things I was capable of. I entertained him with the lives of the Romans, and great men, which charmed him to my company, and her with teaching her all the pretty works<sup>5</sup> that I was mistress of, and telling her stories of nuns, and endeavoring to bring her to the knowledge of the true God. But of all discourses Caesar liked that the worst, and would never be reconciled to our notions of the Trinity, of which he ever made a jest; it was a riddle, he said, would turn his brain to conceive, and one could not make him understand what faith was. However, these conversations failed not altogether so well to divert him that he liked the company of us women much above the men, for he could not drink, and he is but an ill companion in that country that cannot. So that obliging him to love us very well, we had all the liberty of speech with him, especially myself, whom he called his Great Mistress; and indeed my word would go a great way with him. For these reasons, I had opportunity to take notice to him that he was not well pleased of late as he used to be; was more retired and thoughtful; and told him I took it ill he should suspect we would break our words with him, and not permit both him and Clemene to return to his own kingdom, which was not so long a way but when he was once on his voyage he would quickly arrive there. He made me some answers that showed a doubt in him, which made me ask him what advantage it would be to doubt. It would but give us a fear of him, and possibly compel us to treat him so as I should be very loath to behold; that is, it might occasion his confinement. Perhaps this was not so luckily spoke of me, for I perceived he resented that word, which I strove to soften again in vain. However, he assured me that whatsoever resolutions he should take, he would act nothing upon the white people; and as for myself and those upon



that plantation where he was, he would sooner forfeit his eternal liberty, and life itself, than lift his hand against his greatest enemy on that place. He besought me to suffer no fears upon his account, for he could do nothing that honor should not dictate; but he accused himself for having suffered slavery so long; yet he charged that weakness on Love alone, who was capable of making him neglect even glory itself, and for which now he reproaches himself every moment of the day. Much more to this effect he spoke, with an air impatient enough to make me know he would not be long in bondage; and though he suffered only the name of a slave, and had nothing of the toil and labor of one, yet that was sufficient to render him uneasy; and he had been too long idle, who used to be always in action and in arms. He had a spirit all rough and fierce, and that could not be tamed to lazy rest; and though all endeavors were used to exercise himself in such actions and sports as this world afforded, as running, wrestling, pitching the bar, hunting and fishing, chasing and killing tigers of a monstrous size, which this continent affords in abundance, and wonderful snakes, such as Alexander is reported to have encountered at the river of Amazons,<sup>6</sup> and which Caesar took great delight to overcome, yet these were not actions great enough for his large soul, which was still panting after more renowned action.

Before I parted that day with him, I got, with much ado, a promise from him to rest yet a little longer with patience, and wait the coming of the Lord Governor, who was every day expected on our shore; he assured me he would, and this promise he desired me to know was given perfectly in complaisance to me, in whom he had an entire confidence.

After this, I neither thought it convenient to trust him much out of our view, nor did the country, who feared him; but with one accord it was advised to treat him fairly, and oblige him to remain within such a compass, and that he should be permitted as seldom as could be to go up to the plantations of the Negroes or, if he did, to be accompanied by some that should be rather in appearance attendants than spies. This care was for some time taken, and

Caesar looked upon it as a mark of extraordinary respect, and was glad his discontent had obliged 'em to be more observant to him. He received new assurance from the overseer, which was confirmed to him by the opinion of all the gentlemen of the country, who made their court to him. During this time that we had his company more frequently than hitherto we had had, it may not be unpleasant to relate to you the diversions we entertained him with, or rather he us.

My stay was to be short in that country, because my father died at sea, and never arrived to possess the honor was designed him (which was lieutenant general of six and thirty islands, besides the continent<sup>7</sup> of Surinam) nor the advantages he hoped to reap by them; so that though we were obliged to continue on our voyage, we did not intend to stay upon the place. Though, in a word, I must say thus much of it, that certainly had his late Majesty, of sacred memory, but seen and known what a vast and charming world he had been master of in that continent, he would never have parted so easily with it to the Dutch. 'Tis a continent whose vast extent was never yet known, and may contain more noble earth than all the universe besides, for, they say, it reaches from east to west, one way as far as China and another to Peru. It affords all things both for beauty and use; 'tis there eternal spring, always the very months of April, May, and June; the shades are perpetual, the trees bearing at once all degrees of leaves and fruit, from blooming buds to ripe autumn: groves of oranges, lemons, citrons, figs, nutmegs, and noble aromatics, continually bearing their fragrances. The trees appearing all like nosegays adorned with flowers of different kinds; some are all white, some purple, some scarlet, some blue, some yellow; bearing, at the same time, ripe fruit and blooming young, or producing every day new. The very wood of all these trees has an intrinsic value above common timber, for they are, when cut, of different colors, glorious to behold, and bear a price considerable, to inlay withal. Besides this they yield rich balm and gums, so that we make our candles of such an aromatic substance as does not only give a sufficient light, but, as they burn, they cast their perfumes all about. Cedar is the common firing, and all the houses are built with

it. The very meat we eat, when set on the table, if it be native, I mean of the country, perfumes the whole room; especially a little beast called an armadillo, a thing which I can liken to nothing so well as a rhinoceros; 'tis all in white armor, so jointed that it moves as well in it as if it had nothing on; this beast is about the bigness of a pig of six weeks old. But it were endless to give an account of all the diverse wonderful and strange things that country affords, and which we took a very great delight to go in search of, though those adventures are oftentimes fatal and at least dangerous. But while we had Caesar in our company on these designs we feared no harm, nor suffered any.

As soon as I came into the country, the best house in it was presented me, called St. John's Hill. It stood on a vast rock of white marble, at the foot of which the river ran a vast depth down, and not to be descended on that side; the little waves still dashing and washing the foot of this rock made the softest murmurs and purlings in the world; and the opposite bank was adorned with such vast quantities of different flowers eternally blowing,<sup>8</sup> and every day and hour new, fenced behind 'em with lofty trees of a thousand rare forms and colors, that the prospect was the most ravishing that fancy can create. On the edge of this white rock, towards the river, was a walk or grove of orange and lemon trees, about half the length of the Mall<sup>9</sup> here, whose flowery and fruit-bearing branches met at the top and hindered the sun, whose rays are very fierce there, from entering a beam into the grove; and the cool air that came from the river made it not only fit to entertain people in, at all the hottest hours of the day, but refreshed the sweet blossoms and made it always sweet and charming; and sure the whole globe of the world cannot show so delightful a place as this grove was. Not all the gardens of boasted Italy can produce a shade to outvie this, which nature had joined with art to render so exceeding fine; and 'tis a marvel to see how such vast trees, as big as English oaks, could take footing on so solid a rock and in so little earth as covered that rock; but all things by nature there are rare, delightful, and wonderful. But to our sports.

Sometimes we would go surprising,<sup>1</sup> and in search of young tigers in their dens, watching when the old ones went forth to forage for prey; and oftentimes we have been in great danger and have fled apace for our lives when surprised by the dams. But once, above all other times, we went on this design, and Caesar was with us, who had no sooner stolen a young tiger from her nest but, going off, we encountered the dam, bearing a buttock of a cow which he<sup>2</sup> had torn off with his mighty paw, and going with it towards his den. We had only four women, Caesar, and an English gentleman, brother to Harry Martin, the great Oliverian;<sup>3</sup> we found there was no escaping this enraged and ravenous beast. However, we women fled as fast as we could from it; but our heels had not saved our lives if Caesar had not laid down his cub, when he found the tiger quit her prey to make the more speed towards him, and taking Mr. Martin's sword, desired him to stand aside, or follow the ladies. He obeyed him, and Caesar met this monstrous beast of might, size, and vast limbs, who came with open jaws upon him; and fixing his awful stern eyes full upon those of the beast, and putting himself into a very steady and good aiming posture of defense, ran his sword quite through his breast down to his very heart, home to the hilt of the sword. The dying beast stretched forth her paw, and going to grasp his thigh, surprised with death in that very moment, did him no other harm than fixing her long nails in his flesh very deep, feebly wounded him, but could not grasp the flesh to tear off any. When he had done this, he halloed to us to return, which, after some assurance of his victory, we did, and found him lugging out the sword from the bosom of the tiger, who was laid in her blood on the ground; he took up the cub, and with an unconcern that had nothing of the joy or gladness of a victory, he came and laid the whelp at my feet. We all extremely wondered at his daring, and at the bigness of the beast, which was about the heighth of a heifer but of mighty, great, and strong limbs.

Another time, being in the woods, he killed a tiger which had long infested that part, and borne away abundance of sheep and oxen, and other things that were for the support of those to whom they belonged; abundance of people assailed this beast, some affirming

they had shot her with several bullets quite through the body at several times, and some swearing they shot her through the very heart, and they believed she was a devil rather than a mortal thing. Caesar had often said he had a mind to encounter this monster, and spoke with several gentlemen who had attempted her, one crying, "I shot her with so many poisoned arrows," another with his gun in this part of her, and another in that; so that he, remarking all these places where she was shot, fancied still he should overcome her by giving her another sort of a wound than any had yet done; and one day said (at the table), "What trophies and garlands, ladies, will you make me, if I bring you home the heart of this ravenous beast that eats up all your lambs and pigs?" We all promised he should be rewarded at all our hands. So taking a bow, which he choosed out of a great many, he went up in the wood, with two gentlemen, where he imagined this devourer to be; they had not passed very far in it but they heard her voice, growling and grumbling, as if she were pleased with something she was doing. When they came in view, they found her muzzling in the belly of a new ravished sheep, which she had torn open; and seeing herself approached, she took fast hold of her prey with her forepaws and set a very fierce raging look on Caesar, without offering to approach him, for fear at the same time of losing what she had in possession. So that Caesar remained a good while, only taking aim, and getting an opportunity to shoot her where he designed; 'twas some time before he could accomplish it, and to wound her and not kill her would but have enraged her more, and endangered him. He had a quiver of arrows at his side, so that if one failed he could be supplied; at last, retiring a little, he gave her opportunity to eat, for he found she was ravenous, and fell to as soon as she saw him retire, being more eager of her prey than of doing new mischiefs. When he going softly to one side of her, and hiding his person behind certain herbage that grew high and thick, he took so good aim that, as he intended, he shot her just into the eye, and the arrow was sent with so good a will and so sure a hand that it stuck in her brain, and made her caper and become mad for a moment or two; but being seconded by another arrow, he fell dead upon the prey. Caesar cut him open with a knife, to see where those

wounds were that had been reported to him, and why he did not die of 'em. But I shall now relate a thing that possibly will find no credit among men, because 'tis a notion commonly received with us, that nothing can receive a wound in the heart and live; but when the heart of this courageous animal was taken out, there were seven bullets of lead in it, and the wounds seamed up with great scars, and she lived with the bullets a great while, for it was long since they were shot. This heart the conqueror brought up to us, and 'twas a very great curiosity, which all the country came to see, and which gave Caesar occasion of many fine discourses, of accidents in war and strange escapes.

At other times he would go a-fishing; and discoursing on that diversion, he found we had in that country a very strange fish, called a numb eel<sup>4</sup> (an eel of which I have eaten), that while it is alive, it has a quality so cold, that those who are angling, though with a line of never so great a length with a rod at the end of it, it shall, in the same minute the bait is touched by this eel, seize him or her that holds the rod with benumbedness, that shall deprive 'em of sense for a while; and some have fallen into the water, and others dropped as dead on the banks of the rivers where they stood, as soon as this fish touches the bait. Caesar used to laugh at this, and believed it impossible a man could lose his force at the touch of a fish, and could not understand that philosophy,<sup>5</sup> that a cold quality should be of that nature. However, he had a great curiosity to try whether it would have the same effect on him it had on others, and often tried, but in vain. At last the sought for fish came to the bait, as he stood angling on the bank; and instead of throwing away the rod or giving it a sudden twitch out of the water, whereby he might have caught both the eel and have dismissed the rod, before it could have too much power over him, for experiment sake he grasped it but the harder, and fainting fell into the river; and being still possessed of the rod, the tide carried him, senseless as he was, a great way, till an Indian boat took him up, and perceived when they touched him a numbness seize them, and by that knew the rod was in his hand; which with a paddle (that is, a short oar) they struck away, and

snatched it into the boat, eel and all. If Caesar were almost dead with the effect of this fish, he was more so with that of the water, where he had remained the space of going a league, and they found they had much ado to bring him back to life. But at last they did, and brought him home, where he was in a few hours well recovered and refreshed, and not a little ashamed to find he should be overcome by an eel, and that all the people who heard his defiance would laugh at him. But we cheered him up; and he being convinced, we had the eel at supper, which was a quarter of an ell about and most delicate meat, and was of the more value, since it cost so dear as almost the life of so gallant a man.

About this time we were in many mortal fears about some disputes the English had with the Indians, so that we could scarce trust ourselves, without great numbers, to go to any Indian towns or place where they abode, for fear they should fall upon us, as they did immediately after my coming away; and that it was in the possession of the Dutch, who used 'em not so civilly as the English, so that they cut in pieces all they could take, getting into houses and hanging up the mother and all her children about her, and cut a footman I left behind me all in joints, and nailed him to trees.

This feud began while I was there, so that I lost half the satisfaction I proposed, in not seeing and visiting the Indian towns. But one day, bemoaning of our misfortunes upon this account, Caesar told us we need not fear, for if we had a mind to go, he would undertake to be our guard. Some would, but most would not venture; about eighteen of us resolved and took barge, and after eight days arrived near an Indian town. But approaching it, the hearts of some of our company failed, and they would not venture on shore; so we polled who would and who would not. For my part, I said if Caesar would, I would go; he resolved; so did my brother and my woman, a maid of good courage. Now none of us speaking the language of the people, and imagining we should have a half diversion in gazing only and not knowing what they said, we took a fisherman that lived at the mouth of the river, who had been a long inhabitant there, and obliged him to go with us. But because he was known to the Indians, as trading among 'em, and being by long



living there become a perfect Indian in color, we, who resolved to surprise 'em by making 'em see something they never had seen (that is, white people), resolved only myself, my brother and woman should go; so Caesar, the fisherman, and the rest, hiding behind some thick reeds and flowers that grew on the banks, let us pass on towards the town, which was on the bank of the river all along. A little distant from the houses, or huts, we saw some dancing, others busied in fetching and carrying of water from the river. They had no sooner spied us but they set up a loud cry, that frightened us at first; we thought it had been for those that should kill us, but it seems it was of wonder and amazement. They were all naked, and we were dressed so as is most comode for the hot countries, very glittering and rich, so that we appeared extremely fine; my own hair was cut short, and I had a taffety cap with black feathers on my head; my brother was in a stuff<sup>6</sup> suit, with silver loops and buttons and abundance of green ribbon. This was all infinitely surprising to them, and because we saw them stand still till we approached 'em, we took heart and advanced, came up to 'em, and offered 'em our hands; which they took, and looked on us round about, calling still for more company; who came swarming out, all wondering and crying out "*Tepeeme*," taking their hair up in their hands and spreading it wide to those they called out to, as if they would say (as indeed it signified) "Numberless wonders," or not to be recounted, no more than to number the hair of their heads. By degrees they grew more bold, and from gazing upon us round, they touched us, laying their hands upon all the features of our faces, feeling our breasts and arms, taking up one petticoat, then wondering to see another; admiring our shoes and stockings, but more our garters, which we gave 'em, and they tied about their legs, being laced with silver lace at the ends, for they much esteem any shining things. In fine, we suffered 'em to survey us as they pleased, and we thought they would never have done admiring us. When Caesar and the rest saw we were received with such wonder, they came up to us; and finding the Indian trader whom they knew (for 'tis by these fishermen, called Indian traders, we hold a commerce with 'em, for they love not to go far from home, and we never go to them), when they saw him



therefore they set up a new joy, and cried, in their language, "Oh! here's our *tiguamy*, and we shall now know whether those things can speak." So advancing to him, some of 'em gave him their hands and cried, "*Amora tiguamy*," which is as much as, "How do you?" or "Welcome, friend," and all with one din began to gabble to him, and asked if we had sense and wit; if we could talk of affairs of life and war, as they could do; if we could hunt, swim, and do a thousand things they use. He answered 'em, we could. Then they invited us into their houses, and dressed venison and buffalo for us; and going out, gathered a leaf of a tree called a *sarumbo* leaf, of six yards long, and spread it on the ground for a tablecloth; and cutting another in pieces instead of plates, setting us on little bow Indian stools, which they cut out of one entire piece of wood and paint in a sort of japan work. They serve everyone their mess<sup>7</sup> on these pieces of leaves, and it was very good, but too high seasoned with pepper. When we had eat, my brother and I took out our flutes and played to 'em, which gave 'em new wonder; and I soon perceived, by an admiration that is natural to these people, and by the extreme ignorance and simplicity of 'em, it were not difficult to establish any unknown or extravagant religion among them, and to impose any notions or fictions upon 'em. For seeing a kinsman of mine set some paper afire with a burning glass, a trick they had never before seen, they were like to have adored him for a god, and begged he would give them the characters or figures of his name, that they might oppose it against winds and storms; which he did, and they held it up in those seasons, and fancied it had a charm to conquer them, and kept it like a holy relic. They are very superstitious, and called him the great *Peeie*, that is, prophet. They showed us their Indian *Peeie*, a youth of about sixteen years old, as handsome as nature could make a man. They consecrate a beautiful youth from his infancy, and all arts are used to complete him in the finest manner, both in beauty and shape. He is bred to all the little arts and cunning they are capable of, to all the legerdemain tricks and sleight of hand, whereby he imposes upon the rabble, and is both a doctor in physic<sup>8</sup> and divinity; and by these tricks makes the sick believe he sometimes eases their

pains, by drawing from the afflicted part little serpents, or odd flies, or worms, or any strange thing; and though they have besides undoubted good remedies for almost all their diseases, they cure the patient more by fancy than by medicines, and make themselves feared, loved, and revered. This young *Peeie* had a very young wife, who seeing my brother kiss her, came running and kissed me; after this they kissed one another, and made it a very great jest, it being so novel; and new admiration and laughing went round the multitude, that they never will forget that ceremony, never before used or known. Caesar had a mind to see and talk with their war captains, and we were conducted to one of their houses, where we beheld several of the great captains, who had been at council. But so frightful a vision it was to see 'em no fancy can create; no such dreams can represent so dreadful a spectacle. For my part I took 'em for hobgoblins or fiends rather than men; but however their shapes appeared, their souls were very humane and noble; but some wanted their noses, some their lips, some both noses and lips, some their ears, and others cut through each cheek with long slashes, through which their teeth appeared; they had other several formidable wounds and scars, or rather dismemberings. They had *comitias* or little aprons before 'em, and girdles of cotton, with their knives naked, stuck in it; a bow at their backs and a quiver of arrows on their thighs; and most had feathers on their heads of diverse colors. They cried "*Amora tiguamy*" to us at our entrance, and were pleased we said as much to 'em; they seated us, and gave us drink of the best sort, and wondered, as much as the others had done before, to see us. Caesar was marveling as much at their faces, wondering how they should all be so wounded in war; he was impatient to know how they all came by those frightful marks of rage or malice, rather than wounds got in noble battle. They told us, by our interpreter, that when any war was waging, two men chosen out by some old captain whose fighting was past, and who could only teach the theory of war, these two men were to stand in competition for the generalship, or great war captain; and being brought before the old judges, now past labor, they are asked what they dare do to show they are worthy to lead an army. When he who is first asked,

making no reply, cuts off his nose, and throws it contemptibly<sup>9</sup> on the ground; and the other does something to himself that he thinks surpasses him, and perhaps deprives himself of lips and an eye; so they slash on till one gives out, and many have died in this debate. And 'tis by a passive valor they show and prove their activity, a sort of courage too brutal to be applauded by our black hero; nevertheless he expressed his esteem of 'em.

In this voyage Caesar begot so good an understanding between the Indians and the English that there were no more fears or heart-burnings during our stay, but we had a perfect, open, and free trade with 'em. Many things remarkable and worthy reciting we met with in this short voyage, because Caesar made it his business to search out and provide for our entertainment, especially to please his dearly adored Imoinda, who was a sharer in all our adventures; we being resolved to make her chains as easy as we could, and to compliment the Prince in that manner that most obliged him.

As we were coming up again, we met with some Indians of strange aspects; that is, of a larger size and other sort of features than those of our country. Our Indian slaves that rowed us asked 'em some questions, but they could not understand us; but showed us a long cotton string with several knots on it, and told us, they had been coming from the mountains so many moons as there were knots. They were habited in skins of a strange beast, and brought along with 'em bags of gold dust, which, as well as they could give us to understand, came streaming in little small channels down the high mountains when the rains fell; and offered to be the convoy to any body or persons that would go to the mountains. We carried these men up to Parham, where they were kept till the Lord Governor came. And because all the country was mad to be going on this golden adventure, the Governor by his letters commanded (for they sent some of the gold to him) that a guard should be set at the mouth of the river of Amazons<sup>1</sup> (a river so called, almost as broad as the river of Thames) and prohibited all people from going up that river, it conducting to those mountains of gold. But we going off for England before the project was further prosecuted, and the Governor

being drowned in a hurricane, either the design died, or the Dutch have the advantage of it. And 'tis to be bemoaned what his Majesty lost by losing that part of America.

Though this digression is a little from my story, however since it contains some proofs of the curiosity and daring of this great man, I was content to omit nothing of his character.

It was thus for some time we diverted him; but now Imoinda began to show she was with child, and did nothing but sigh and weep for the captivity of her lord, herself, and the infant yet unborn, and believed if it were so hard to gain the liberty of two, 'twould be more difficult to get that for three. Her griefs were so many darts in the great heart of Caesar; and taking his opportunity one Sunday when all the whites were overtaken in drink, as there were abundance of several trades and slaves for four years<sup>2</sup> that inhabited among the Negro houses, and Sunday was their day of debauch (otherwise they were a sort of spies upon Caesar), he went pretending out of goodness to 'em to feast amongst 'em; and sent all his music, and ordered a great treat for the whole gang, about three hundred Negroes; and about a hundred and fifty were able to bear arms, such as they had, which were sufficient to do execution<sup>3</sup> with spirits accordingly. For the English had none but rusty swords that no strength could draw from a scabbard, except the people of particular quality, who took care to oil 'em and keep 'em in good order. The guns also, unless here and there one, or those newly carried from England, would do no good or harm; for 'tis the nature of that country to rust and eat up iron, or any metals but gold and silver. And they are very unexpert at the bow, which the Negroes and Indians are perfect masters of.

Caesar, having singled out these men from the women and children, made an harangue to 'em of the miseries and ignominies of slavery, counting up all their toils and sufferings, under such loads, burdens, and drudgeries as were fitter for beasts than men, senseless brutes than human souls. He told 'em, it was not for days, months, or years, but for eternity; there was no end to be of their misfortunes. They suffered not like men, who might find a glory and

fortitude in oppression, but like dogs that loved the whip and bell,<sup>4</sup> and fawned the more they were beaten. That they had lost the divine quality of men and were become insensible asses, fit only to bear; nay, worse: an ass, or dog, or horse, having done his duty, could lie down in retreat and rise to work again, and while he did his duty endured no stripes; but men, villainous, senseless men such as they, toiled on all the tedious week till Black Friday;<sup>5</sup> and then, whether they worked or not, whether they were faulty or meriting, they promiscuously, the innocent with the guilty, suffered the infamous whip, the sordid stripes, from their fellow slaves, till their blood trickled from all parts of their body, blood whose every drop ought to be revenged with a life of some of those tyrants that impose it. "And why," said he, "my dear friends and fellow sufferers, should we be slaves to an unknown people? Have they vanquished us nobly in fight? Have they won us in honorable battle? And are we by the chance of war become their slaves? This would not anger a noble heart, this would not animate a soldier's soul; no, but we are bought and sold like apes or monkeys, to be the sport of women, fools, and cowards, and the support of rogues, runagades,<sup>6</sup> that have abandoned their own countries for rapine, murders, thefts, and villainies. Do you not hear every day how they upbraid each other with infamy of life, below the wildest savages; and shall we render obedience to such a degenerate race, who have no one human virtue left to distinguish 'em from the vilest creatures? Will you, I say, suffer the lash from such hands?" They all replied, with one accord, "No, no, no; Caesar has spoke like a great captain, like a great king."

After this he would have proceeded, but was interrupted by a tall Negro of some more quality than the rest; his name was Tuscan; who bowing at the feet of Caesar, cried, "My lord, we have listened with joy and attention to what you have said, and, were we only men, would follow so great a leader through the world. But oh! consider, we are husbands and parents too, and have things more dear to us than life, our wives and children, unfit for travel in these unpassable woods, mountains, and bogs; we have not only difficult lands to overcome, but rivers to wade, and monsters to encounter,

ravenous beasts of prey—.” To this, Caesar replied that honor was the first principle in nature that was to be obeyed; but as no man would pretend to that, without all the acts of virtue, compassion, charity, love, justice, and reason, he found it not inconsistent with that to take an equal care of their wives and children as they would of themselves; and that he did not design, when he led them to freedom and glorious liberty, that they should leave that better part of themselves to perish by the hand of the tyrant’s whip. But if there were a woman among them so degenerate from love and virtue to choose slavery before the pursuit of her husband, and with the hazard of her life to share with him in his fortunes, that such a one ought to be abandoned, and left as a prey to the common enemy.

To which they all agreed—and bowed. After this, he spoke of the impassable woods and rivers, and convinced ‘em, the more danger, the more glory. He told them that he had heard of one Hannibal, a great captain, had cut his way through mountains of solid rocks;<sup>2</sup> and should a few shrubs oppose them, which they could fire before ‘em? No, ‘twas a trifling excuse to men resolved to die or overcome. As for bogs, they are with a little labor filled and hardened; and the rivers could be no obstacle, since they swam by nature, at least by custom, from their first hour of their birth. That when the children were weary they must carry them by turns, and the woods and their own industry would afford them food. To this they all assented with joy.

Tuscan then demanded what he would do. He said, they would travel towards the sea, plant a new colony, and defend it by their valor; and when they could find a ship, either driven by stress of weather or guided by Providence that way, they would seize it and make it a prize, till it had transported them to their own countries; at least, they should be made free in his kingdom, and be esteemed as his fellow sufferers, and men that had the courage and the bravery to attempt, at least, for liberty; and if they died in the attempt it would be more brave than to live in perpetual slavery.

They bowed and kissed his feet at this resolution, and with one accord vowed to follow him to death. And that night was appointed

to begin their march; they made it known to their wives, and directed them to tie their hamaca<sup>8</sup> about their shoulder and under their arm like a scarf, and to lead their children that could go, and carry those that could not. The wives, who pay an entire obedience to their husbands, obeyed, and stayed for 'em where they were appointed. The men stayed but to furnish themselves with what defensive arms they could get; and all met at the rendezvous, where Caesar made a new encouraging speech to 'em, and led 'em out.

But as they could not march far that night, on Monday early, when the overseers went to call 'em all together to go to work, they were extremely surprised to find not one upon the place, but all fled with what baggage they had. You may imagine this news was not only suddenly spread all over the plantation, but soon reached the neighboring ones; and we had by noon about six hundred men they call the militia of the county, that came to assist us in the pursuit of the fugitives. But never did one see so comical an army march forth to war. The men of any fashion would not concern themselves, though it were almost the common cause; for such revoltings are very ill examples, and have very fatal consequences oftentimes in many colonies. But they had a respect for Caesar, and all hands were against the Parhamites, as they called those of Parham plantation, because they did not, in the first place, love the Lord Governor, and secondly they would have it that Caesar was ill used, and baffled with;<sup>9</sup> and 'tis not impossible but some of the best in the country was of his counsel in this flight, and depriving us of all the slaves; so that they of the better sort would not meddle in the matter. The deputy governor,<sup>1</sup> of whom I have had no great occasion to speak, and who was the most fawning fair-tongued fellow in the world and one that pretended the most friendship to Caesar, was now the only violent man against him; and though he had nothing, and so need fear nothing, yet talked and looked bigger than any man. He was a fellow whose character is not fit to be mentioned with the worst of the slaves. This fellow would lead his army forth to meet Caesar, or rather to pursue him; most of their arms were of those sort of cruel whips they call cat with nine tails; some had rusty useless guns for



show, others old basket hilts<sup>2</sup> whose blades had never seen the light in this age, and others had long staffs and clubs. Mr. Trefry went along, rather to be a mediator than a conqueror in such a battle; for he foresaw and knew, if by fighting they put the Negroes into despair, they were a sort of sullen fellows that would drown or kill themselves before they would yield; and he advised that fair means was best. But Byam was one that abounded in his own wit and would take his own measures.

It was not hard to find these fugitives; for as they fled they were forced to fire and cut the woods before 'em, so that night or day they pursued 'em by the light they made and by the path they had cleared. But as soon as Caesar found he was pursued, he put himself in a posture of defense, placing all the women and children in the rear, and himself with Tuscan by his side, or next to him, all promising to die or conquer. Encouraged thus, they never stood to parley, but fell on pell-mell upon the English, and killed some and wounded a good many, they having recourse to their whips as the best of their weapons. And as they observed no order, they perplexed the enemy so sorely with lashing 'em in the eyes; and the women and children seeing their husbands so treated, being of fearful cowardly dispositions, and hearing the English cry out, "Yield and live, yield and be pardoned," they all run in amongst their husbands and fathers, and hung about 'em, crying out, "Yield, yield; and leave Caesar to their revenge"; that by degrees the slaves abandoned Caesar, and left him only Tuscan and his heroic Imoinda; who, grown big as she was, did nevertheless press near her lord, having a bow and a quiver full of poisoned arrows, which she managed with such dexterity that she wounded several, and shot the governor<sup>3</sup> into the shoulder; of which wound he had like to have died, but that an Indian woman, his mistress, sucked the wound and cleansed it from the venom. But however, he stirred not from the place till he had parleyed with Caesar, who he found was resolved to die fighting, and would not be taken; no more would Tuscan, or Imoinda. But he, more thirsting after revenge of another sort than that of depriving him of life, now made use of all his art of talking



and dissembling, and besought Caesar to yield himself upon terms which he himself should propose, and should be sacredly assented to and kept by him. He told him, it was not that he any longer feared him, or could believe the force of two men, and a young heroine, could overcome all them, with all the slaves now on their side also; but it was the vast esteem he had for his person, the desire he had to serve so gallant a man, and to hinder himself from the reproach hereafter of having been the occasion of the death of a prince whose valor and magnanimity deserved the empire of the world. He protested to him, he looked upon this action as gallant and brave, however tending to the prejudice of his lord and master, who would by it have lost so considerable a number of slaves; that this flight of his should be looked on as a heat of youth, and rashness of a too forward courage, and an unconsidered impatience of liberty, and no more; and that he labored in vain to accomplish that which they would effectually perform as soon as any ship arrived that would touch on his coast. "So that if you will be pleased," continued he, "to surrender yourself, all imaginable respect shall be paid you; and yourself, your wife, and child, if it be here born, shall depart free out of our land."

But Caesar would hear of no composition;<sup>4</sup> though Byam urged, if he pursued and went on in his design, he would inevitably perish, either by great snakes, wild beasts, or hunger; and he ought to have regard to his wife, whose condition required ease, and not the fatigues of tedious travel, where she could not be secured from being devoured. But Caesar told him, there was no faith in the white men or the gods they adored, who instructed 'em in principles so false that honest men could not live amongst 'em; though no people professed so much, none performed so little; that he knew what he had to do when he dealt with men of honor, but with them a man ought to be eternally on his guard, and never to eat and drink with Christians without his weapon of defense in his hand; and for his own security, never to credit one word they spoke. As for the rashness and inconsiderateness of his action, he would confess the governor is in the right; and that he was ashamed of what he had

done, in endeavoring to make those free who were by nature slaves, poor wretched rogues, fit to be used as Christians' tools; dogs, treacherous and cowardly, fit for such masters; and they wanted only but to be whipped into the knowledge of the Christian gods to be the vilest of all creeping things, to learn to worship such deities as had not power to make 'em just, brave, or honest. In fine, after a thousand things of this nature, not fit here to be recited, he told Byam he had rather die than live upon the same earth with such dogs. But Trefry and Byam pleaded and protested together so much that Trefry, believing the governor to mean what he said, and speaking very cordially himself, generously put himself into Caesar's hands, and took him aside and persuaded him, even with tears, to live, by surrendering himself, and to name his conditions. Caesar was overcome by his wit and reasons, and in consideration of Imoinda; and demanding what he desired, and that it should be ratified by their hands in writing, because he had perceived that was the common way of contract between man and man, amongst the whites. All this was performed, and Tuscan's pardon was put in, and they surrender to the governor, who walked peaceably down into the plantation with 'em, after giving order to bury their dead. Caesar was very much toiled with the bustle of the day, for he had fought like a fury; and what mischief was done he and Tuscan performed alone, and gave their enemies a fatal proof that they durst do anything and feared no mortal force.

But they were no sooner arrived at the place where all the slaves receive their punishments of whipping, but they laid hands on Caesar and Tuscan, faint with heat and toil; and surprising them, bound them to two several stakes, and whipped them in a most deplorable and inhuman manner, rending the very flesh from their bones; especially Caesar, who was not perceived to make any moan or to alter his face, only to roll his eyes on the faithless governor, and those he believed guilty, with fierceness and indignation; and to complete his rage, he saw every one of those slaves, who but a few days before adored him as something more than mortal, now had a whip to give him some lashes, while he strove not to break his fetters; though if he had, it were impossible. But he pronounced a

woe and revenge from his eyes, that darted fire that 'twas at once both awful and terrible to behold.

When they thought they were sufficiently revenged on him, they untied him, almost fainting with loss of blood from a thousand wounds all over his body, from which they had rent his clothes, and led him bleeding and naked as he was, and loaded him all over with irons; and then rubbed his wounds, to complete their cruelty, with Indian pepper, which had like to have made him raving mad; and in this condition made him so fast to the ground that he could not stir, if his pains and wounds would have given him leave. They spared Imoinda, and did not let her see this barbarity committed towards her lord, but carried her down to Parham and shut her up; which was not in kindness to her, but for fear she should die with the sight, or miscarry, and then they should lose a young slave and perhaps the mother.

You must know, that when the news was brought on Monday morning that Caesar had betaken himself to the woods and carried with him all the Negroes, we were possessed with extreme fear, which no persuasions could dissipate, that he would secure himself till night, and then that he would come down and cut all our throats. This apprehension made all the females of us fly down the river, to be secured; and while we were away they acted this cruelty. For I suppose I had authority and interest enough there, had I suspected any such thing, to have prevented it; but we had not gone many leagues but the news overtook us that Caesar was taken and whipped like a common slave. We met on the river with Colonel Martin, a man of great gallantry, wit, and goodness, and whom I have celebrated in a character of my new comedy<sup>5</sup> by his own name, in memory of so brave a man. He was wise and eloquent and, from the fineness of his parts, bore a great sway over the hearts of all the colony. He was a friend to Caesar, and resented this false dealing with him very much. We carried him back to Parham, thinking to have made an accommodation; when we came, the first news we heard was that the governor was dead of a wound Imoinda had given him; but it was not so well. But it seems he would have the

pleasure of beholding the revenge he took on Caesar, and before the cruel ceremony was finished, he dropped down; and then they perceived the wound he had on his shoulder was by a venomous arrow, which, as I said, his Indian mistress healed by sucking the wound.

We were no sooner arrived but we went up to the plantation to see Caesar, whom we found in a very miserable and unexpressible condition; and I have a thousand times admired how he lived, in so much tormenting pain. We said all things to him that trouble, pity, and good nature could suggest, protesting our innocence of the fact and our abhorrence of such cruelties; making a thousand professions of services to him and begging as many pardons for the offenders, till we said so much that he believed we had no hand in his ill treatment; but told us he could never pardon Byam; as for Trefry, he confessed he saw his grief and sorrow for his suffering, which he could not hinder, but was like to have been beaten down by the very slaves for speaking in his defense. But for Byam, who was their leader, their head—and should, by his justice and honor, have been an example to 'em—for him, he wished to live, to take a dire revenge of him, and said, "It had been well for him if he had sacrificed me, instead of giving me the contemptible<sup>6</sup> whip." He refused to talk much, but begging us to give him our hands, he took 'em, and protested never to lift up his to do us any harm. He had a great respect for Colonel Martin, and always took his counsel like that of a parent, and assured him he would obey him in anything but his revenge on Byam. "Therefore," said he, "for his own safety, let him speedily dispatch me; for if I could dispatch myself I would not, till that justice were done to my injured person,<sup>7</sup> and the contempt of a soldier. No, I would not kill myself, even after a whipping, but will be content to live with that infamy, and be pointed at by every grinning slave, till I have completed my revenge; and then you shall see that Oroonoko scorns to live with the indignity that was put on Caesar." All we could do could get no more words from him; and we took care to have him put immediately into a healing bath to rid him of his pepper, and ordered a surgeon<sup>8</sup> to anoint him with healing balm,

which he suffered; and in some time he began to be able to walk and eat. We failed not to visit him every day, and to that end had him brought to an apartment at Parham.

The governor was no sooner recovered, and had heard of the menaces of Caesar, but he called his council; who (not to disgrace them, or burlesque the government there) consisted of such notorious villains as Newgate<sup>9</sup> never transported; and possibly originally were such who understood neither the laws of God or man, and had no sort of principles to make 'em worthy the name of men; but at the very council table would contradict and fight with one another, and swear so bloodily that 'twas terrible to hear and see 'em. (Some of 'em were afterwards hanged when the Dutch took possession of the place, others sent off in chains.) But calling these special rulers of the nation together, and requiring their counsel in this weighty affair, they all concluded that (Damn 'em) it might be their own cases; and that Caesar ought to be made an example to all the Negroes, to fright 'em from daring to threaten their betters, their lords and masters; and at this rate no man was safe from his own slaves; and concluded, *nemine contradicente*,<sup>1</sup> that Caesar should be hanged.

Trefry then thought it time to use his authority, and told Byam his command did not extend to his lord's plantation, and that Parham was as much exempt from the law as Whitehall,<sup>2</sup> and that they ought no more to touch the servants of the Lord — (who there represented the King's person) than they could those about the King himself; and that Parham was a sanctuary; and though his lord were absent in person, his power was still in being there, which he had entrusted with him as far as the dominions of his particular plantations reached, and all that belonged to it; the rest of the country, as Byam was lieutenant to his lord, he might exercise his tyranny upon. Trefry had others as powerful, or more, that interested themselves in Caesar's life, and absolutely said he should be defended. So turning the governor and his wise council out of doors (for they sat at Parham House), they set a guard upon our landing

place, and would admit none but those we called friends to us and Caesar.

The governor having remained wounded at Parham till his recovery was completed, Caesar did not know but he was still there; and indeed, for the most part his time was spent there, for he was one that loved to live at other people's expense; and if he were a day absent, he was ten present there, and used to play and walk and hunt and fish with Caesar. So that Caesar did not at all doubt, if he once recovered strength, but he should find an opportunity of being revenged on him. Though after such a revenge, he could not hope to live, for if he escaped the fury of the English mobile,<sup>3</sup> who perhaps would have been glad of the occasion to have killed him, he was resolved not to survive his whipping; yet he had, some tender hours, a repenting softness, which he called his fits of coward, wherein he struggled with Love for the victory of his heart, which took part with his charming Imoinda there; but for the most part his time was passed in melancholy thought and black designs. He considered, if he should do this deed and die, either in the attempt or after it, he left his lovely Imoinda a prey, or at best a slave, to the enraged multitude; his great heart could not endure that thought. "Perhaps," said he, "she may be first ravished by every brute, exposed first to their nasty lusts and then a shameful death." No; he could not live a moment under that apprehension, too insupportable to be borne. These were his thoughts and his silent arguments with his heart, as he told us afterwards; so that now resolving not only to kill Byam but all those he thought had enraged him, pleasing his great heart with the fancied slaughter he should make over the whole face of the plantation, he first resolved on a deed, that (however horrid it at first appeared to us all), when we had heard his reasons, we thought it brave and just. Being able to walk and, as he believed, fit for the execution of his great design, he begged Trefry to trust him into the air, believing a walk would do him good, which was granted him; and taking Imoinda with him, as he used to do in his more happy and calmer days, he led her up into a wood, where, after (with a thousand sighs, and long gazing silently on her face, while tears

gushed, in spite of him, from his eyes) he told her his design first of killing her, and then his enemies, and next himself, and the impossibility of escaping, and therefore he told her the necessity of dying, he found the heroic wife faster pleading for death than he was to propose it, when she found his fixed resolution, and on her knees besought him not to leave her a prey to his enemies. He (grieved to death) yet pleased at her noble resolution, took her up, and embracing her with all the passion and languishment of a dying lover, drew his knife to kill this treasure of his soul, this pleasure of his eyes; while tears trickled down his cheeks, hers were smiling with joy she should die by so noble a hand, and be sent in her own country (for that's their notion of the next world) by him she so tenderly loved and so truly adored in this; for wives have a respect for their husbands equal to what any other people pay a deity, and when a man finds any occasion to quit his wife, if he love her, she dies by his hand; if not, he sells her, or suffers some other to kill her. It being thus, you may believe the deed was soon resolved on; and 'tis not to be doubted but the parting, the eternal leave-taking of two such lovers, so greatly born, so sensible,<sup>4</sup> so beautiful, so young, and so fond, must be very moving, as the relation of it was to me afterwards.





C. Grignion, after J. Barralet, ***Mr. Savigny in the Character of Oroonoko***; engraving, 1785. Through the 18th century, the story



of *Oroonoko* was known mostly from a 1696 play adapted from Behn's work by Thomas Southerne. His version makes Imoinda White, as this scene from a 1775 production shows. The actor plays Oroonoko in blackface and is here on the verge of killing Imoinda. From *Oroonoko. A tragedy. Written by Thomas Southern, Marked with the variations in the manager's book, at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane* (1785).

---

All that love could say in such cases being ended, and all the intermitting irresolutions being adjusted, the lovely, young, and adored victim lays herself down before the sacrificer; while he, with a hand resolved and a heart breaking within, gave the fatal stroke; first cutting her throat, and then severing her yet smiling face from that delicate body, pregnant as it was with fruits of tenderest love. As soon as he had done, he laid the body decently on leaves and flowers, of which he made a bed, and concealed it under the same coverlid of nature; only her face he left yet bare to look on. But when he found she was dead and past all retrieve, never more to bless him with her eyes and soft language, his grief swelled up to rage; he tore, he raved, he roared, like some monster of the wood, calling on the loved name of Imoinda. A thousand times he turned the fatal knife that did the deed toward his own heart, with a resolution to go immediately after her; but dire revenge, which now was a thousand times more fierce in his soul than before, prevents him; and he would cry out, "No; since I have sacrificed Imoinda to my revenge, shall I lose that glory which I have purchased so dear as at the price of the fairest, dearest, softest creature that ever nature made? No, no!" Then, at her name, grief would get the ascendant of rage, and he would lie down by her side and water her face with showers of tears, which never were wont to fall from those eyes. And however bent he was on his intended slaughter, he had not power to stir from the sight of this dear object, now more beloved and more adored than ever.

He remained in this deploring condition for two days, and never rose from the ground where he had made his sad sacrifice. At last,

rousing from her side, and accusing himself with living too long now Imoinda was dead, and that the deaths of those barbarous enemies were deferred too long, he resolved now to finish the great work; but offering to rise, he found his strength so decayed that he reeled to and fro, like boughs assailed by contrary winds; so that he was forced to lie down again, and try to summon all his courage to his aid. He found his brains turned round, and his eyes were dizzy, and objects appeared not the same to him they were wont to do; his breath was short, and all his limbs surprised with a faintness he had never felt before. He had not eat in two days, which was one occasion of this feebleness, but excess of grief was the greatest; yet still he hoped he should recover vigor to act his design, and lay expecting it yet six days longer, still mourning over the dead idol of his heart, and striving every day to rise, but could not.

In all this time you may believe we were in no little affliction for Caesar and his wife; some were of opinion he was escaped never to return; others thought some accident had happened to him. But however, we failed not to send out an hundred people several ways to search for him; a party of about forty went that way he took, among whom was Tuscan, who was perfectly reconciled to Byam. They had not gone very far into the wood but they smelt an unusual smell, as of a dead body; for stinks must be very noisome that can be distinguished among such a quantity of natural sweets as every inch of that land produces. So that they concluded they should find him dead, or somebody that was so. They passed on towards it, as loathsome as it was, and made such a rustling among the leaves that lie thick on the ground, by continual falling, that Caesar heard he was approached; and though he had during the space of these eight days endeavored to rise, but found he wanted strength, yet looking up and seeing his pursuers, he rose and reeled to a neighboring tree, against which he fixed his back; and being within a dozen yards of those that advanced and saw him, he called out to them and bid them approach no nearer, if they would be safe. So that they stood still, and hardly believing their eyes, that would persuade them that it was Caesar that spoke to 'em, so much was he altered, they asked him what he had done with his wife, for they smelt a stink that

almost struck them dead. He, pointing to the dead body, sighing, cried, "Behold her there." They put off the flowers that covered her with their sticks, and found she was killed, and cried out, "Oh, monster! that hast murdered thy wife." Then asking him why he did so cruel a deed, he replied, he had no leisure to answer impertinent questions. "You may go back," continued he, "and tell the faithless governor he may thank fortune that I am breathing my last, and that my arm is too feeble to obey my heart in what it had designed him." But his tongue faltering, and trembling, he could scarce end what he was saying. The English, taking advantage by his weakness, cried, "Let us take him alive by all means." He heard 'em; and as if he had revived from a fainting, or a dream, he cried out, "No, gentlemen, you are deceived; you will find no more Caesars to be whipped, no more find a faith in me. Feeble as you think me, I have strength yet left to secure me from a second indignity." They swore all anew, and he only shook his head and beheld them with scorn. Then they cried out, "Who will venture on this single man? Will nobody?" They stood all silent while Caesar replied, "Fatal will be the attempt to the first adventurer, let him assure himself," and at that word, held up his knife in a menacing posture. "Look ye, ye faithless crew," said he, "'tis not life I seek, nor am I afraid of dying," and at that word cut a piece of flesh from his own throat, and threw it at 'em; "yet still I would live if I could, till I had perfected my revenge. But oh! it cannot be; I feel life gliding from my eyes and heart, and if I make not haste, I shall yet fall a victim to the shameful whip." At that, he ripped up his own belly, and took his bowels and pulled 'em out, with what strength he could; while some, on their knees imploring, besought him to hold his hand. But when they saw him tottering, they cried out, "Will none venture on him?" A bold English cried, "Yes, if he were the devil" (taking courage when he saw him almost dead); and swearing a horrid oath for his farewell to the world, he rushed on him; Caesar, with his armed hand, met him so fairly as stuck him to the heart, and he fell dead at his feet. Tuscan, seeing that, cried out, "I love thee, O Caesar, and therefore will not let thee die, if possible." And running to him, took him in his arms; but at the same time warding a blow that Caesar made at his bosom, he

received it quite through his arm; and Caesar having not the strength to pluck the knife forth, though he attempted it, Tuscan neither pulled it out himself nor suffered it to be pulled out, but came down with it sticking in his arm; and the reason he gave for it was, because the air should not get into the wound. They put their hands across, and carried Caesar between six of 'em, fainted as he was, and they thought dead, or just dying; and they brought him to Parham, and laid him on a couch, and had the chirurgion immediately to him, who dressed his wounds and sewed up his belly, and used means to bring him to life, which they effected. We ran all to see him, and if before we thought him so beautiful a sight, he was now so altered that his face was like a death's head blacked over, nothing but teeth and eyeholes. For some days we suffered nobody to speak to him, but caused cordials to be poured down his throat, which sustained his life; and in six or seven days he recovered his senses. For you must know that wounds are almost to a miracle cured in the Indies, unless wounds in the legs, which rarely ever cure.

When he was well enough to speak, we talked to him, and asked him some questions about his wife, and the reasons why he killed her; and he then told us what I have related of that resolution, and of his parting; and he besought us we would let him die, and was extremely afflicted to think it was possible he might live; he assured us if we did not dispatch him, he would prove very fatal to a great many. We said all we could to make him live, and gave him new assurances; but he begged we would not think so poorly of him, or of his love to Imoinda, to imagine we could flatter him to life again; but the chirurgion assured him he could not live, and therefore he need not fear. We were all (but Caesar) afflicted at this news; and the sight was gashly;<sup>5</sup> his discourse was sad, and the earthly smell about him so strong that I was persuaded to leave the place for some time (being myself but sickly, and very apt to fall into fits of dangerous illness upon any extraordinary melancholy). The servants and Trefry and the chirurgions promised all to take what possible care they could of the life of Caesar, and I, taking boat, went with

other company to Colonel Martin's, about three days' journey down the river; but I was no sooner gone, but the governor taking Trefry about some pretended earnest business a day's journey up the river, having communicated his design to one Banister, a wild Irishman and one of the council, a fellow of absolute barbarity, and fit to execute any villainy, but was rich: he came up to Parham, and forcibly took Caesar, and had him carried to the same post where he was whipped; and causing him to be tied to it, and a great fire made before him, he told him he should die like a dog, as he was. Caesar replied, this was the first piece of bravery that ever Banister did, and he never spoke sense till he pronounced that word; and if he would keep it, he would declare, in the other world, that he was the only man of all the whites that ever he heard speak truth. And turning to the men that bound him, he said, "My friends, am I to die, or to be whipped?" And they cried, "Whipped! No, you shall not escape so well." And then he replied, smiling, "A blessing on thee," and assured them they need not tie him, for he would stand fixed like a rock, and endure death so as should encourage them to die. "But if you whip me," said he, "be sure you tie me fast."

He had learned to take tobacco; and when he was assured he should die, he desired they would give him a pipe in his mouth, ready lighted, which they did; and the executioner came, and first cut off his members,<sup>6</sup> and threw them into the fire; after that, with an ill-favored knife, they cut his ears, and his nose, and burned them; he still smoked on, as if nothing had touched him. Then they hacked off one of his arms, and still he bore up, and held his pipe; but at the cutting off the other arm, his head sunk, and his pipe dropped, and he gave up the ghost, without a groan or a reproach. My mother and sister were by him all the while, but not suffered to save him, so rude and wild were the rabble, and so inhuman were the justices, who stood by to see the execution, who after paid dearly enough for their insolence. They cut Caesar in quarters, and sent them to several of the chief plantations. One quarter was sent to Colonel Martin, who refused it, and swore he had rather see the quarters of Banister and the governor himself than those of Caesar

on his plantations, and that he could govern his Negroes without terrifying and grieving them with frightful spectacles of a mangled king.

Thus died this great man, worthy of a better fate, and a more sublime wit than mine to write his praise; yet, I hope, the reputation of my pen is considerable enough to make his glorious name to survive to all ages, with that of the brave, the beautiful, and the constant Imoinda.

## Endnotes

1688

- Note 1: The text, prepared by Joanna Lipking, is based on the 1688 edition, the sole edition published during Behn's lifetime. The critical edition of G. C. Duchovnay (diss., Indiana, 1971), which collates the four 17th-century editions, has been consulted.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Richard Maitland (1653–1695), fourth Earl of Lauderdale, Scottish nobleman loyal to James II, who would soon join his king in France after the revolution of 1688 deposed him.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Despite her high social standing in the South American colony, Behn could not save Oroonoko's life. "Other world": the so-called New World—here South America.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Like the fictions in a romance tale.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Oroonoko.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A British sugar colony on the South American coast east of Venezuela; later Dutch Guiana, now the Republic of Suriname.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A name appearing in local descriptions, but the animal is not clearly identified; probably the lion-headed marmoset or perhaps the *cujara* (Portuguese), a rodent known as the rice rat. "Buffaloes": wild oxen of various species.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Butterflies. "Antiquaries": probably the natural history museum of the Royal Society.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: The title character in the 1664 heroic play by Sir Robert Howard and John Dryden, which was noted for its lavish production. There are contemporary records of “speckled plumes” and feather headdresses.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: About a foot square.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Extremely.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Capacity to lead.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Not a country but a British-held fort and market in enslaved people on the Gold Coast of Africa, in modern-day Ghana. As the trade expanded, the enslaved people and workers shipped out from the region (who came to be called Cormantines) impressed many European observers by their beauty and bearing, their fierceness in war, and their extreme dignity under captivity or torture.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Loosely used for any dark-skinned person.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Charles I, beheaded in 1649 during the civil wars between Royalists and Parliamentarians. In 1688 this remark and others would have signaled Behn’s ardent support of James II, the last of the Stuart kings, who would be forced into exile within the year.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sculptor.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Except for. The singling out of Africans with European looks or moral values is by no means unique to Behn; for example, Edward Long’s 1774 *History of Jamaica* reports of the Cormantines that “their features are very different from the rest of the African Negroes, being smaller, and more of the European turn.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Shrewd, sagacious.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Reverence.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Company. “Admired”: marveled.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Benefits.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, grandson.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: So that.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Women teachers or chaperones. “Cast”: that is, cast-off.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Insults.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Rank.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Remnant.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Company.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Offensive.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In spite of. Oroonoko is saying that he will die before the king does.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Racking.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Soothed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The ship's captain.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Hoist.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Word of honor.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The past form of *eat*.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lord Willoughby of Parham, coproprietor of Surinam by royal grant. John Treffry, or Trefry, was his plantation overseer.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An outer garment or robe.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: White person; a variant of *backra*, from an Ibo word that enslaved Africans brought to Surinam and the Caribbean.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Coarse cotton or linen, sometimes called osnaburg, after a German cloth-manufacturing town.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Lacked.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In 1667 the Dutch attacked and conquered Surinam, and England ceded it by treaty in exchange for New York.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Contributing jointly.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The sun.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A long-haired dog or poodle, especially associated with women of fashion.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, a novel event or piece of news.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Incised. The carving is likened to figured lacquerwork in the Japanese style and to elaborate "high point" lace.[Return to reference 2](#)



- Note 3: A North British people appearing in histories of England and Scotland.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Suspicions.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Decorative needlework or other handiwork.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Alexander the Great is supposed to have encountered both snakes and Amazons in a campaign against India. "Pitching the bar": game in which players compete in throwing a heavy bar or rod. "Tigers": wild cats, including the South American jaguar and cougar.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "Land not disjoined by the sea from other lands" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Blooming.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Fashionable walk in St. James's Park in London.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A military term for making sudden raids.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The jarring mixture of pronouns in the two accounts of the tigers (wild cats) may suggest a reluctance to use a feminine pronoun in moments of extreme violence. The first account was left uncorrected in all four 17th-century editions.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Supporter of Oliver Cromwell.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Electric eel.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Hypothesis or system upon which natural effects are explained" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Woven fabric, worsted. "Commode": suitable.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Meal.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Medicine.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: With contempt.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The mouth of the Amazon, in Brazil, is far distant from Surinam.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: White people who, for crimes or debt, were indentured for a fixed period. "Trades": tradesman.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Harm, slaughter.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Proverbial for something that distracts from comfort or pleasure, from the protective charm on chariots of triumphing generals in ancient Rome.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Here a day of customary beating; more widely, a Friday bringing some notable disaster, from students' slang for examination day.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Renegades or fugitives.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Carthaginian general and his troops literally hacked their way down the Alps into Italy to attack Rome.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Hammock.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cheated.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: William Byam. There are recorded complaints against him for high-handedness and from him about insubordination by settlers and enslaved people.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Swords with protective hilt guards.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, Byam, the deputy governor.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Settlement.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: *The Younger Brother; or, The Amorous Jilt*, not produced until 1696 despite this piece of promotion.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Showing contempt.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Body or character.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Surgeon.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The major London prison, from which criminals were transported to the colonies.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: No one disagreeing (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The king's palace in London. Trefry stands as Lord Willoughby's deputy on his private land, Byam in the colony at large.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Common people or mob.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sensitive.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ghastly.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Genitals.[Return to reference 6](#)

# **ANNE FINCH, COUNTESS OF WINCHILSEA 1661–1720**

Born into an ancient country family, Anne Kingsmill became a maid of honor at the court of Charles II. There she met Colonel Heneage Finch; in 1684 they married. During the short reign of James II, they prospered at court. The king's fall in 1688, however, changed their fortunes: they were forced to leave court, and Heaneage was briefly arrested. For the rest of their lives, the Finches remained Nonjurors, refusing to swear allegiance to the new monarch, William III, and, instead, retaining Jacobite sympathies to the deposed James and his line. Eventually, they settled on a beautiful family estate at Eastwell, in Kent, near the south coast of England. At Eastwell, Finch wrote many of her poems, influenced, she said, by the "solitude and security of the country" and by "objects naturally inspiring soft and poetical imaginations." In their later years, the Finches returned to London, where Finch moved in influential literary circles, and in 1712 her husband became the Earl of Winchilsea. Their marriage was a happy one, and her husband supported her poetry.

Finch offers a fascinating example of a woman writer navigating issues surrounding gender, poetry, and print. Early in her career, she circulated her work among friends and their social networks in thoughtfully designed manuscript books. In the "Introduction" to those volumes, she roundly critiqued societal expectations for

women, as she explained her reasons for not printing her poems. In later years, though, her thinking about print changed. She contributed individual poems to popular miscellany collections, and in 1713 she published a volume entirely of her own verse, *Miscellany Poems on Several Occasions, Written by a Lady*. In the printed volume's introductory poem, "Mercury and the Elephant," she framed her work very differently, cleverly brushing aside the criticisms that might meet her poetry. Finch was savvy about the possibilities and pitfalls of print, strategically choosing which poems to publish where (never publishing some political poems, for instance).

Finch's reputation today was shaped by William Wordsworth, who in the nineteenth century praised her carefully observed nature poetry, especially "Nocturnal Reverie." It was also shaped by Virginia Woolf, who in the early twentieth century emphasized the Finch of "The Introduction," the woman alone and indignant in her garden who can only "To some few friends, and to [her] sorrows sing." But both of these are very partial depictions: Finch was celebrated in her moment and wrote not only nature poetry but also fables, ballads, plays, and poems on politics, religion, and fashionable society. Principled, pious, witty, and brilliant, Finch is her own best example of what a poet can be.

## The Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Did I, my lines intend for public view,  
How many censures would their faults pursue,  
Some would, because such words they do affect,  
Cry they're insipid, empty, uncorrect.  
5 And many have attained, dull and untaught,  
The name of wit, only by finding fault.  
True judges might condemn their want of wit,  
And all might say, they're by a woman writ.  
Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,  
Such an intruder on the rights of men,  
10 Such a presumptuous creature is esteemed,  
The fault can by no virtue be redeemed.  
They tell us, we mistake our sex and way;  
Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play  
Are the accomplishments we should desire;  
15 To write, or read, or think, or to enquire,  
Would cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,  
And interrupt the conquests of our prime;  
Whilst the dull manage<sup>o</sup> of a servile house  
Is held by some our outmost art, and use.  
20       Sure 'twas not ever thus, nor are we told  
Fables,<sup>o</sup> of women that excelled of old;  
To whom, by the diffusive hand of heaven  
Some share of wit, and poetry was given.  
On that glad day, on which the Ark returned,  
25 The holy pledge, for which the land had mourned,  
The joyful tribes attend it on the way,  
The Levites<sup>2</sup> do the sacred charge convey,  
Whilst various instruments before it play;  
30 Here holy virgins in the concert join,

The louder notes, to soften and refine,  
And with alternate verse,<sup>3</sup> complete the  
hymn divine.

}

Lo! the young Poet, after God's own  
heart,<sup>4</sup>

By Him inspired, and taught the Muses art,  
Returned from conquest, a bright chorus meets,  
35 That sing his slain ten thousand in the streets.<sup>5</sup>  
In such loud numbers<sup>6</sup> they his acts declare,  
Proclaim the wonders of his early war,  
That Saul upon the vast applause does frown,  
And feels its mighty thunder shake the crown.  
40 What can the threatened judgment now prolong?<sup>7</sup>  
Half of the kingdom is already gone;  
The fairest half, whose influence guides the rest,  
Have David's empire o'er their hearts confessed.

A woman here, leads fainting Israel on,  
45 She fights, she wins, she triumphs with a song,<sup>8</sup>  
Devout, majestic, for the subject fit,  
And far above her arms, exalts her wit,  
Then, to the peaceful, shady palm withdraws,  
And rules the rescued nation with her laws.

50 How are we fall'n, fall'n by mistaken rules,  
And education's, more than nature's fools;  
Debarred from all improvements of the mind,  
And to be dull, expected and designed;<sup>9</sup>  
And if some one would soar above the rest,  
55 With warmer fancy, and ambition pressed,  
So strong th' opposing faction still appears,  
The hopes to thrive can ne'er outweigh the fears.  
Be cautioned, then, my Muse, and still retired;  
Nor be despised, aiming to be admired;  
60 Conscious of wants,<sup>10</sup> still with contracted wing,  
To some few friends, and to thy sorrows sing;  
For groves of laurel,<sup>11</sup> thou wert never meant;

Be dark enough thy shades, and be thou there  
content.

1689? **Endnotes**

1903

- Note 1: This poem prefaced Finch's early manuscript books and explored some of her reasons for circulating a collection of her work in manuscript, not print. Later, her attitude toward print changed.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Levites were charged with carrying the Ark of the Covenant. In 1 Chronicles 15, David had it restored to Jerusalem.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Finch imagines the choir of virgins chanting every other line, responsively, as in some of the Psalms.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Acts 13:22 recounts God describing David, the Psalmist, as "a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: 1 Samuel 18:6–7.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Measures of music and verse.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: What can now stave off the threatened judgment? Saul's doom ("judgment") had been prophesied. God would replace him with a better king.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The prophet and judge Deborah sang praise to the Lord for the victory she herself had brought about (Judges 4–5).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Laurel branches symbolized greatness in poetry.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *management*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stories*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intended*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inadequacies*[Return to reference °](#)

# Mercury and the Elephant: A Prefatory Fable<sup>1</sup>

As Merc'ry travelled through a wood,  
(Whose errands are more fleet than good)<sup>2</sup>  
An elephant before him lay,  
That much encumbered had the way:  
The messenger, who's still in haste,  
5 Would fain<sup>o</sup> have bowed, and so have passed;  
When up arose th' unwieldy brute,  
And would repeat a late dispute,  
In which (he said) he'd gained the prize  
From a wild boar of monstrous size:  
10 But Fame (quoth he) with all her tongues,  
Who lawyers, ladies, soldiers wrongs,  
Has, to my disadvantage, told  
An action throughly<sup>o</sup> bright and bold;  
Has said, that I foul play had used,  
15 And with my weight th' opposer bruised;  
Had laid my trunk about his brawn,  
Before his tushes<sup>o</sup> could be drawn;  
Had stunned him with a hideous roar,  
And twenty-thousand scandals more:  
20 But I defy the talk of men,  
Or voice of brutes in ev'ry den;  
Th' impartial skies are all my care,  
And how it stands recorded there.  
Amongst you Gods, pray, what is thought?  
25 Quoth Mercury—Then have you fought!  
Solicitous<sup>o</sup> thus should I be  
For what's said of my verse and me;  
Or should my friends excuses frame,



30 And beg the criticks not to blame  
 (Since from a female hand it came)  
 Defects in judgment, or in wit;  
 They'd but reply—Then has she writ!<sup>3</sup>

Our vanity we more betray,  
 In asking what the world will say,  
 35 Than if, in trivial things like these,  
 We wait on the event<sup>o</sup> with ease;  
 Nor make long prefaces, to show  
 What men are not concerned to know:  
 For still untouched how we succeed,  
 40 'Tis for themselves, not us, they read;  
 Whilst that proceeding to requite,<sup>o</sup>  
 We own (who in the Muse delight)  
 'Tis for ourselves, not them, we write.

Betrayed by solitude to try  
 45 Amusements, which the prosp'rous fly;<sup>o</sup>  
 And only to the press repair,  
 To fix our scattered papers there;  
 Tho' whilst our labors are preserved,  
 The printers may, indeed, be starved.  
 50

## Endnotes

1713

- Note 1: This prefatory poem to Finch's 1713 printed collection exhibits a strikingly different attitude toward print, women's authorship, and reputation than the "Introduction." The fable was one of Finch's most popular modes. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Roman god Mercury was messenger and trickster, associated with swift ("fleet") movement. His name was used in many newspaper titles, and thus fitting for this meditation on print and reputation. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The elephant in the fable is an example of what not to do. Overly concerned about his reputation, he spreads the very rumor that he hopes the gods have not heard. Applying the

moral to her own authorship, Finch embraces the fact that she might matter as little to the critics as the elephant to Mercury, but she also refuses to offer conventional apologies for “defects in judgment, or in wit” that prefaced many texts.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *gladly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thoroughly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tusks*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *worried*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *outcome*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *match; respond to*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flee*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***From The Spleen***<sup>1</sup>

What art thou, Spleen, which ev'ry thing dost ape<sup>o</sup>?  
Thou Proteus<sup>2</sup> to abused mankind,  
Who never yet thy real cause could find,  
Or fix thee to remain in one continued shape.  
Still varying thy perplexing form,  
5 Now a dead sea thou'lt<sup>o</sup> represent,  
A calm of stupid discontent,  
Then, dashing on the rocks wilt rage into a storm.  
Trembling sometimes thou dost appear,  
Dissolved into a panic fear;  
10 On sleep intruding dost thy shadows spread,  
Thy gloomy terrors round the silent bed,  
And crowd with boading<sup>o</sup> dreams the  
melancholy head: }  
Or, when the midnight hour is told,  
And drooping lids thou still dost waking hold,  
15 Thy fond delusions cheat the eyes,  
Before them antic<sup>o</sup> specters dance,  
Unusual fires their pointed heads advance,  
And airy phantoms rise.  
Such was the monstrous vision seen,  
20 When Brutus (now beneath his cares oppressed,  
And all Rome's fortunes rolling in his breast,  
Before Philippi's latest field,  
Before his fate did to Octavius lead)  
25 Was vanquished by the Spleen.<sup>3</sup>

Falsely, the mortal part we blame  
Of our depressed, and pond'rous frame,<sup>o</sup>  
Which, till the first degrading sin

Let Thee, its dull attendant, in,<sup>4</sup>  
Still with the other did comply,  
30 Nor clogged the active soul, disposed to fly,  
And range the mansions of its native sky. }  
Nor, whilst in his own heaven he dwelt,  
Whilst man his paradise possessed,  
His fertile garden in the fragrant East,<sup>o</sup>  
35 And all united odors smelt,  
No arméd sweets, until thy reign,  
Could shock the sense, or in the face  
A flushed, unhandsome color place.  
Now the jonquil<sup>o</sup> o'ercomes the feeble brain;  
40 We faint beneath the aromatic pain,  
Till some offensive scent thy pow'rs appease,  
And pleasure we resign for short, and nauseous  
ease.

In ev'ry one thou dost possess,  
New are thy motions, and thy dress:  
45 Now in some grove a list'ning friend  
Thy false suggestions must attend,  
Thy whispered griefs, thy fancied sorrows hear,  
Breathed in a sigh, and witnessed by a tear;  
Whilst in the light, and vulgar crowd,  
50 Thy slaves, more clamorous and loud,  
By laughters unprovoked, thy influence too confess.  
In the imperious wife thou vapors art,  
Which from o'erheated passions rise  
In clouds to the attractive<sup>o</sup> brain,  
55 Until descending thence again,  
Thro' the o'er-cast, and show'ring eyes,  
Upon her husband's softened heart,  
He the disputed point must yield,  
Something resign of the contested field;  
60 Till lordly man, born to imperial sway,

Compounds for peace, to make that right  
away,<sup>5</sup>  
And woman, armed with Spleen, does  
servilely obey.

}

65 The fool, to imitate the wits,  
Complains of thy pretended fits,  
And dullness, born with him, would lay<sup>o</sup>  
Upon thy accidental sway;<sup>6</sup>  
Because, sometimes, thou dost presume  
Into the ablest heads to come:  
70 That, often, men of thoughts refined,  
Impatient of unequal sense,  
Such slow returns, where they so much dispense,  
Retiring from the crowd, are to thy shades inclined.

O'er me alas! thou dost too much prevail:  
75 I feel thy force, whilst I against thee  
rail;  
I feel my verse decay, and my cramped  
numbers fail.

}

Thro' thy black jaundice<sup>7</sup> I all objects see,  
As dark, and terrible as thee,  
My lines decried,<sup>o</sup> and my employment thought  
An useless folly, or presumptuous fault:  
80 Whilst in the Muses' paths I stray,  
Whilst in their groves, and by their secret springs  
My hand delights to trace unusual things,  
And deviates from the known, and common way;<sup>8</sup>

85 Nor will in fading silks compose  
Faintly th' inimitable Rose,  
Fill up an ill-drawn bird, or paint on glass  
The sov'reign's blurred and undistinguished  
face,  
The threatening Angel, and the speaking  
Ass.<sup>9</sup>

}

## 1701 **Endnotes**

1713

- Note 1: "The Spleen" was Finch's most famous poem in her lifetime. Disorders of the spleen, often called "vapors" or just "the spleen" (after what was understood as their bodily cause), were common and associated with a wide range of what we today think of as psychological symptoms: depression, melancholy, sluggishness, mood swings, delusions, or anger. Finch's poem about the relationship between body and mind bears comparison with the "Cave of Spleen" in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (see p. 538).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A mythological god capable of changing shapes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (4.3.278), a "monstrous apparition," the ghost of Julius Caesar, appears to Brutus (Marcus Junius Brutus, ca. 85–42 B.C.E.) and says he will see Brutus at the upcoming Battle of Philippi (42 B.C.E.) between forces of Brutus and Cassius on one side, and those of Octavian ("Octavius," 63 B.C.E.–14 C.E., later Emperor Caesar Augustus) and Marc Antony on the other. After losing the battle, Brutus commits suicide.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, the original sin that caused humans to be cast out of Eden also "let in" bodily pain and diseases like the spleen.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Man surrenders, and legally signs away his "imperial" rights. "Compounds": settles by concession.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The spleen was a fashionable complaint, sometimes feigned.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A particular problem involving the spleen; Finch is interested in how it could impact vision.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: While Finch earlier described the spleen hindering her writing, here it seems enabling.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Finch distinguishes her writing from more traditional feminine crafts of embroidery and glass painting. She also distinguishes its themes: she's not copying the picture of a bird, a rose, the king, or a scene from a Bible story. "Threatning Angel, the speaking ass": reference to Numbers 22:21–35. After this, the poem continues for some sixty more lines. [Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *imitate* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thou wilt* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foreboding, sinister* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unnatural, grotesque* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *human body* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Eden* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *daffodil* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *capable of attracting* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *blame* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *criticized* [Return to reference °](#)

# Upon the Hurricane<sup>1</sup>

You have obeyed, you winds, that must fulfill  
The Great Disposer's<sup>o</sup> righteous will;  
Throughout the land, unlimited you flew,  
Nor sought, as heretofore, with friendly aid  
Only, new motion to bestow  
5 Upon the sluggish vapors, bred below,  
Condensing into mists, and melancholy shade.  
No more such gentle methods you pursue,  
But marching now in terrible array,  
Undistinguished was your prey:  
10 In vain the shrubs, with lowly bent,  
Sought their destruction to prevent;  
The beech in vain, with out-stretched arms,  
Deprecates<sup>o</sup> th' approaching harms;  
In vain the oak (so often stormed)  
15 Relied upon that native force,  
By which already was performed  
So much of his appointed course,  
As made him, fearless of decay,  
Wait but the accomplished time  
20 Of his long-wished and useful prime,  
To be removed, with honor, to the sea.<sup>2</sup>  
The straight and ornamental pine  
Did in the like ambition join,  
And thought his fame should ever last,  
25 When in some royal ship he stood the planted mast;  
And should again his length of timber rear,  
And new engrafted branches wear  
Of fibrous cordage and impending shrouds,<sup>3</sup>



Still trimmed with human care, and watered by the  
clouds.

But oh, you trees! who solitary stood;  
Or you, whose numbers formed a wood;  
You, who on mountains chose to rise,  
And drew them nearer to the skies;  
Or you, whom valleys late did hold  
35 In flexible and lighter mold;  
You num'rous brethren of the leafy kind,  
To whatsoever use designed,  
Now, vain you found it to contend  
With not, alas! one element your friend;  
40 Your Mother Earth, thro' long preceding rains,  
(Which undermining sink below)  
No more her wonted strength retains;  
Nor you so fixed within her bosom grow,  
That for your sakes she can resolve to bear  
45 These furious shocks of hurrying air;  
But finding all your ruin did conspire,  
She soon her beauteous progeny resigned  
To this destructive, this imperious wind,  
That checked your nobler aims, and gives you to the  
50 fire.

Thus! have thy cedars, Libanus, been struck  
As the lithe osiers twisted round;  
Thus! Cadez, has thy wilderness been shook,  
When the appalling, and tremendous sound  
55 Of rattling tempests o'er you broke,  
And made your stubborn glories bow,  
When in such whirlwinds the Almighty spoke,  
Warning Judea then, as our Britannia now.  
Yet these were the remoter harms,  
Foreign the care, and distant the alarms:  
60 Whilst but sheltring trees alone,  
Mastered soon, and soon o'erthrown,

Felt those gusts, which since prevail,  
And loftier palaces assail;  
Whose shaken turrets now give way,  
65 With vain inscriptions, which the frieze has  
borne<sup>5</sup>  
Through ages past, t'extol<sup>o</sup> and to adorn,  
And to our latter times convey;  
Who did the structures' deep foundation lay,  
Forcing his praise upon the gazing crowd,  
70 And, whilst he molders in a scanty shroud,  
Telling both earth and skies, he when alive was  
proud.  
Now down at once comes the superfluous load,  
The costly fret-work<sup>o</sup> with it yields,  
Whose imitated fruits and flow'rs are strewed,  
75 Like those of real growth o'er the autumnal fields.  
The present owner lifts his eyes,  
And the swift change with sad affrightment  
spies:  
The ceiling gone, that late<sup>o</sup> the roof concealed;  
The roof untiled, thro' which the heav'ns  
80 revealed,  
Exposes now his head, when all defense has failed.

What, alas, is to be done!  
Those, who in cities would from dangers run,  
Do but increasing dangers meet,  
And Death, in various shapes, attending in the  
85 street;  
Where some, too tardy in their flight,  
O'ertaken by a worse mischance,  
Their upward parts do scarce advance,  
When on their following limbs th' extending ruins  
light.<sup>o</sup>  
90 One half's interred, the other yet survives,  
And for release with fainting vigor strives;

95                    Implores the aid of absent friends in vain;  
                      With fault'ring speech, and dying wishes calls  
                      Those, whom perhaps, their own domestic walls  
By parallel distress, or swifter death retains.

                      O Wells! thy Bishop's mansion we lament,<sup>6</sup>  
                      So tragical the fall, so dire th' event!  
                      But let no daring thought presume  
                      To point a cause for that oppressive doom.  
100                   Yet strictly pious Ken!<sup>7</sup> had'st thou been there,  
This fate, we think, had not become thy share;  
                      Nor had that awful fabric<sup>o</sup> bowed,  
                      Sliding from its loosened bands;  
                      Nor yielding timbers been allowed  
105                   To crush thy ever-lifted hands,  
                      Or interrupt thy pray'r.  
                      Those orisons,<sup>o</sup> that nightly watches keep,  
Had called thee from thy bed, or there secured thy  
sleep.

                      Whilst you, bold winds and storms! his Word  
obeyed,  
110                   Whilst you his scourge the Great Jehova made,  
And into ruined heaps our edifices laid.  
                      You South and West<sup>8</sup> the tragedy began,  
As, with disordered haste, you o'er the surface ran;  
                      Forgetting, that you were designed  
                      (Chiefly thou Zephyrus,<sup>o</sup> thou softest wind!)

115                   Only our heats, when sultry, to allay,  
And chase the od'rous gums by your dispersing play.  
                      Now, by new orders and decrees,  
                      For our chastisement<sup>o</sup> issued forth,  
120                   You on his confines the alarmed North<sup>9</sup>  
                      With equal fury sees,  
                      And summons swiftly to his aid

Eurus,<sup>o</sup> his confederate made,  
His eager second in th' opposing fight,  
That even the winds may keep the balance  
125 right,  
Nor yield increase of sway to arbitrary might.  
Meeting now, they all contend,  
Those assail, while these defend;  
Fierce and turbulent the war,  
And in the loud tumultuous jar  
130 Winds their own fifes, and clarions<sup>1</sup> are.  
Each cavity, which art or nature leaves,  
Their inspiration<sup>2</sup> hastily receives;  
Whence, from their various forms and size,  
As various symphonies arise,  
135 Their trumpet ev'ry hollow tube is made,  
And, when more solid bodies they invade,  
Enraged, they can no farther come,  
The beaten flat,<sup>o</sup> whilst it repels the noise,  
Resembles but with more outrageous voice  
140 The soldier's threatening drum:  
And when they compass thus our world around,  
When they our rocks and mountains rend,<sup>o</sup>  
When they our sacred piles to their foundations  
send,  
No wonder if our echoing caves rebound;  
145 No wonder if our listening sense they wound,  
When armed with so much force, and ushered with  
such sound.  
  
Nor scarce, amidst the terrors of that night,  
When you, fierce winds, such desolations  
wrought,  
When you from out his stores the Great Commander  
150 brought,  
Could the most righteous stand upright;

Scarcely the holiest man performs  
The service, that becomes it best,  
By ardent vows, or solemn pray'rs addressed;  
Nor finds the calm, so usual to his breast,  
155 Full proof<sup>o</sup> against such storms.  
How should the guilty then be found,  
The men in wine, or looser pleasures drowned,  
To fix a steadfast hope, or to maintain their ground!  
When at his glass the late companion feels,  
160 That giddy, like himself, the tott'ring mansion reels!  
The miser, who with many a chest  
His gloomy tenement oppressed,  
Now fears the overburthened floor,  
And trembles for his life, but for his treasure more.  
165 What shall he do, or to what pow'rs apply?  
To those, which threaten from on high,  
By him ne'er called upon before,  
Who also will suggest th' impossible restore?  
No; Mammon,<sup>3</sup> to thy laws he will be true,  
170 And, rather than his wealth, will bid the world adieu.  
The rafters sink, and buried with his coin  
That fate does with his living thoughts combine;  
For still his heart's enclosed within a golden mine.

Contention with its angry brawls  
175 By storms o'er-clamored, shrinks and falls;  
Nor Whig, nor Tory now the rash contender calls.  
Those, who but vanity allowed,  
Nor thought it reached the name of sin,  
To be of their perfections proud,  
180 Too much adorned without, or too much raised  
within,  
Now find, that even the lightest things,  
As the minuter parts of air,  
When number to their weight addition brings,

185           Can, like the small, but numerous insects'  
              stings,  
Can, like th' assembled winds, urge ruin and despair.

Thus you've obeyed, you winds, that must fulfill  
The Great Disposer's righteous will:  
Thus did your breath a strict inquiry make,  
Thus did you our most secret sins awake,  
190           And thus chastised their ill.◊

              Whilst vainly those, of a rapacious◊ mind,  
              Fields to other fields had laid,  
              By force, or by injurious bargains joined,  
195           With fences for their guard impenetrable made;  
              The juster tempest mocks the wrong,  
              And sweeps, in its directed flight,  
              Th' enclosures of another's right,<sup>4</sup>  
Driving at once the bounds, and licensed◊ herds  
along.

200           The Earth again one general scene appears;  
              No regular distinction now,  
              Betwixt the grounds for pasture, or the plough,  
              The face of Nature wears.

205           Free as the men, who wild confusion love,  
              And lawless liberty approve,  
              Their fellow-brutes pursue their way,  
              To their own loss, and disadvantage  
              stray, }  
As wretched in their choice, as unadvised as }  
they.

210           The tim'rous deer, whilst he forsakes the park,  
              And wanders on, in the misguiding dark,  
              Believes, a foe from ev'ry unknown bush  
              Will on his trembling body rush,  
              Taking the winds, that vary in their notes,

For hot pursuing hounds with deeply bellowing  
throats.  
215 Th' awaked birds, shook from their nightly seats,  
Their unavailing pinions<sup>o</sup> ply,  
Repulsed, as they attempt to fly  
In hopes they might attain to more secure retreats.  
But, where ye wildered<sup>o</sup> fowls would you repair?  
220 When this your happy portion given,  
Your upward lot, your firmament of heaven,  
Your unentailed, your undivided air,<sup>5</sup>  
Where no proprietor was ever known,  
Where no litigious suits have ever grown,  
225 Whilst none from star to star could call the space his  
own;  
When this no more your middle flights can bear,  
But some rough blast too far above conveys,  
Or to unquitted Earth confines your weak essays.<sup>o</sup>  
Nor you, nor wiser man could find repose,  
230 Nor could our industry produce  
Expedients of the smallest use,  
To ward our greater cares, or mitigate<sup>o</sup> your  
woes.  
Ye clouds! that pitied our distress,<sup>6</sup>  
And by your pacifying showers  
(The soft and usual methods of success)  
235 Kindly assayed<sup>o</sup> to make this tempest less;  
Vainly your aid was now alas! employed,  
In vain you wept o'er those destructive hours,  
In which the winds full tyranny enjoyed,  
Nor would allow you to prevail,  
240 But drove your scorned, and scattered tears to wail  
The land that lay destroyed.  
Whilst you obeyed, you winds! that must fulfill  
The just Disposer's righteous will;  
245 Whilst not the Earth alone, you disarray,

But to more ruined seas winged your impetuous way.

Which to foreshew, the still portentuous *Sun*<sup>7</sup>  
Beamless, and pale of late, his race begun,<sup>8</sup>  
Quenching the rays, he had no joy to keep,  
In the obscure, and sadly threatened deep.  
250 Farther than we, that Eye of Heaven discerns,  
And nearer placed to our malignant stars,<sup>9</sup>  
Our brooding tempests, and approaching wars  
Anticipating learns.

When now, too soon the dark event  
255 Shows what that faded planet meant;  
Whilst more the liquid empire<sup>o</sup> undergoes,  
More she resigns of her entrusted stores,  
The wealth, the strength, the pride of diff'rent  
shores

In one devoted,<sup>o</sup> one recorded night,  
260 Than years had known destroyed by generous  
fight,

Or privateering foes.<sup>1</sup>  
All rules of conduct laid aside,  
No more the baffled pilot steers,  
Or knows an art, when it each moment veers,  
265 To vary with the winds, or stem th' unusual tide.  
Dispersed and loose, the shattered vessels stray,  
Some perish within sight of shore,  
Some, happier thought, obtain a wider sea,  
But never to return, or cast an anchor more!  
270 Some on the Northern coasts are thrown,  
And by congealing<sup>o</sup> surges compassed round,  
To fixed and certain ruin bound,  
Immoveable are grown:

The fatal Goodwin<sup>2</sup> swallows all that come  
275 Within the limits of that dangerous sand,  
Amphibious in its kind, nor sea nor land;



Yet kin to both, a false and faithless strand,  
 Known only to our cost for a devouring tomb.  
 Nor seemed the hurricane content,  
 280      Whilst only ships were wrecked, and tackle rent;  
     ◊  
     The sailors too must fall a prey,  
 Those that command, with those that did obey;  
 The best supporters of thy pompous style,<sup>3</sup>  
 Thou far renowned, thou powerful British Isle!  
 285      Foremost in naval strength, and sov'reign of the sea!  
 These from thy aid that wrathful night divides,  
 Plunged in those waves, o'er which this title  
 rides.  
  
 What art thou, envied Greatness, at the best,  
 In thy deluding splendors dressed?  
 290      What are thy glorious titles, and thy forms?  
 Which cannot give security, or rest  
 To favored men, or kingdoms that contest  
 With popular assaults, or providential storms!  
 Whilst on th' Omnipotent our fate depends,  
 295      And they are only safe, whom He alone defends.  
 Then let to Heaven our general praise be sent,  
 Which did our farther loss, our total wreck prevent.  
 And as our aspirations do ascend,  
 Let every thing be summoned to attend;  
 300      And let the poet after God's own heart<sup>4</sup>  
 Direct our skill in that sublimer part,  
 And our weak numbers◊ mend!

## Endnotes

1713

- Note 1: The poem's full title is "A Pindaric Poem *Upon the Hurricane* in November 1703, *referring to this Text in Psalm 148.* ver. 8. Winds and Storms fulfilling his Word." In November 1703,

a terrible storm caused destruction in the south of England: Daniel Defoe estimated over 8,000 deaths and stopped counting fallen trees in Kent after 17,000. Finch's poem tries to understand how this catastrophic event fits into a divine plan, pointedly not offering a simple political moral as many contemporaries did.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Timber from trees was used in ship-building.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Finch imagines a ship's pine mast as a new kind of tree, with the ropes in the rigging (cordage and shrouds) as branches. Engrafting is a botanical procedure in which a shoot from one plant is joined with another.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Kadesh, a biblical place. See Psalms 29:5–8, "the voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon . . . the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A frieze is a decorative architectural feature, in this case inscribed with celebratory text.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Bishop's palace at Wells was blown down and killed Bishop [Richard] Kidder with his Lady [*Finch's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The bishop who died in the storm had replaced the pious and popular Thomas Ken. Ken lost his place in 1689, when he refused to swear an oath of allegiance to William and Mary (a political position that the Finches supported).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: South and West Winds.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The North Wind.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Fifes and clarions are wind instruments associated with military music.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: From the same root word as *respiration*, the breathing in of air.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A personification of greed and the desire for riches.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The practice of enclosure converted common land to private property, in order to maximize agricultural production

- and profit.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In contrast to the land, the sky is not subject to human property arrangements, including legal arrangements for inheritance like entails.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: We had a great shower of rain in the midst of the storm [*Finch's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: The Ancients looked upon the sun (or Phoebus) as prophetic [*Finch's note*]. The sun is a "portent" or omen.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: One day of the summer before the storm, we had an unusual appearance of the sun (which was observed by many people in several parts of Kent). It was of a pale dead color, without any beams or brightness for some hours in the morning, although obstructed by no clouds; for the sky was clear [*Finch's note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: Stars portending (or causing) evil.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: That is, more ships were lost than had been lost to years of naval battles or capture by armed privateering ships.[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: The Goodwin Sands near the Straits of Dover, notorious for shipwrecks.[Return to reference 2](#)
  - Note 3: Those who best support or uphold the official title (style) of British imperial power.[Return to reference 3](#)
  - Note 4: Acts 13:22 recounts God describing David, the Psalmist, as "a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will."[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *God's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prays to be delivered from*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *soil*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *usual*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Lebanon*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *willow branches*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *to praise*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ornamental feature*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *recently*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fall*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *awe-inspiring building*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prayers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *West Wind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *punishment*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *East Wind*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flat plane*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tear, destroy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defense*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *punished their evil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *greedy*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *freed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *inadequate wings*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bewildered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *attempts*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lessen, give relief from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *tried*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the ocean*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ill-fated*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *turning to ice*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the rigging destroyed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *versification*[Return to reference](#) °

## A Nocturnal Reverie

In such a night,<sup>1</sup> when every louder wind  
Is to its distant cavern safe confined;  
And only gentle Zephyr fans his wings,  
And lonely Philomel,<sup>o</sup> still waking, sings;  
Or from some tree, famed for the owl's delight,  
5 She, hollowing clear, directs the wanderer right:  
In such a night, when passing clouds give place,  
Or thinly veil the heavens' mysterious face;  
When in some river, overhung with green,  
The waving moon and trembling leaves are seen;  
10 When freshened grass now bears itself upright,  
And makes cool banks to pleasing rest invite,  
Whence springs the woodbind, and the bramble-  
rose,  
And where the sleepy cowslip sheltered grows;  
Whilst now a paler hue the foxglove takes,  
15 Yet checkers still with red the dusky brakes:<sup>o</sup>  
When scattered glow-worms, but in twilight fine,  
Show trivial beauties watch their hour to shine;  
Whilst Salisbury<sup>2</sup> stands the test of every light,  
In perfect charms, and perfect virtue bright:  
20 When odors, which declined repelling day,  
Through temperate air uninterrupted stray;  
When darkened groves their softest shadows wear,  
And falling waters we distinctly hear;  
When through the gloom more venerable shows  
25 Some ancient fabric,<sup>o</sup> awful in repose,  
While sunburnt hills their swarthy looks conceal,  
And swelling haycocks thicken up the vale:  
When the loosed horse now, as his pasture leads,  
Comes slowly grazing through the adjoining meads,

30 Whose stealing pace, and lengthened shade we fear,  
 Till torn-up forage in his teeth we hear:  
 When nibbling sheep at large pursue their food,  
 And unmolested kine rechew the cud;  
 35 When curlews cry beneath the village walls,  
 And to her straggling brood the partridge calls;  
 Their shortlived jubilee the creatures keep,  
 Which but endures, whilst tyrant man does sleep;  
 When a sedate content the spirit feels,  
 And no fierce light disturbs, whilst it reveals;  
 40 But silent musings urge the mind to seek  
 Something, too high for syllables to speak;  
 Till the free soul to a composedness charmed,  
 Finding the elements of rage disarmed,  
 O'er all below a solemn quiet grown,  
 45 Joys in the inferior world,<sup>3</sup> and thinks it like her own:  
 In such a night let me abroad remain,  
 Till morning breaks, and all's confused again;  
 Our cares, our toils, our clamors are renewed,  
 Or pleasures, seldom reached, again pursued.  
 50

## Endnotes

1713

- Note 1: This phrase, repeated twice in this poem, echoes the same repeated phrase in the night piece that opens act 5 of *The Merchant of Venice*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Probably Lady Salisbury, the daughter of a friend. The sense is that this lady differs from others more trivial, who like glowworms look fine only one hour a day.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The world of nature (compared to the world of the soul).[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *nightingale*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *thickets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *edifice*[Return to reference](#) °

# MARY ASTELL

## 1666–1731

The term *feminism* would not enter the language until some 150 years after her death, but Mary Astell's powerful advocacy for women's education and rights in marriage has led scholars to see her as a founder of the modern women's movement. Daughter of a Newcastle merchant, Astell was encouraged and educated by her uncle, a clergyman. She never forgot what he taught her: a confidence in her own reason and a religious faith entirely compatible with reason. In her twenties she moved to Chelsea, on the outskirts of London, where she spent the rest of her life. There she championed the causes of women and the Church of England, and her vigorous way of arguing (not only in print but in person) won her many admirers, among both men and women. Her political and religious polemics also put her at odds with many important writers, including John Locke and Daniel Defoe. One of her best-known works, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), was, like the rest of her writings, published anonymously ("by a Lover of her Sex"). It advocates the founding of a monastic school or retreat for women, where a rigorous, wide-ranging education could be combined with moral and religious discipline. Though the idea was never carried out, it had a broad influence on later plans for educating women, as well as on literature.

To question the customs and laws of marriage is to question society itself, its distribution of money and power and love. During



the eighteenth century many of the terms of marriage were renegotiated. The older view of the wife as a chattel, bound by contract to a husband whom others had chosen for her and whom she was sworn to obey, was hotly debated and challenged. The witty arguments of Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) reflect this growing debate between the sexes. Another work published in the same year, *Some Reflections upon Marriage*, takes a more independent position. Marriage, according to Astell, is all too often a trap. She insists that a woman should be guided by reason, not only in choosing a mate but in choosing whether or not to marry at all (Astell herself never married). So long as the institution of marriage perpetuates inequality rather than a true partnership of minds, women had better beware of flattery and look to themselves or to God, not to men, for the hope of a better life. She added "A Preface, in Answer to Some Objections" to the *Reflections* in 1706; in this preface she directly challenges the thinking of Locke, making a famous retort to his *Second Treatise of Government*: "If *all men are born free*, how is it that all women are born slaves?" Astell's critique understands that politics extends to the domestic sphere, a contention that would inspire generations of feminist writers.

## ***From Some Reflections upon Marriage***<sup>1</sup>

If marriage be such a blessed state, how comes it, may you say, that there are so few happy marriages? Now in answer to this, it is not to be wondered that so few succeed; we should rather be surprised to find so many do, considering how imprudently men engage, the motives they act by, and the very strange conduct they observe throughout.

For pray, what do men propose to themselves in marriage? What qualifications do they look after in a spouse? What will she bring? is the first enquiry: How many acres? Or how much ready coin? Not that this is altogether an unnecessary question, for marriage without a competency, that is, not only a bare subsistence, but even a handsome and plentiful provision, according to the quality<sup>2</sup> and circumstances of the parties, is no very comfortable condition. They who marry for love, as they call it, find time enough to repent their rash folly, and are not long in being convinced, that whatever fine speeches might be made in the heat of passion, there could be no *real kindness* between those who can agree to make each other miserable. But as an estate is to be considered, so it should not be the *main*, much less the *only* consideration; for happiness does not depend on wealth.

\* \* \*

But suppose a man does not marry for money, though for one that does not, perhaps there are thousands that do; suppose he marries for love, an heroic action, which makes a mighty noise in the world, partly because of its rarity, and partly in regard of its extravagancy, and what does his marrying for love amount to? There's no great odds between his marrying for the love of money, or for the love of beauty; the man does not act according to reason in either case, but is governed by irregular appetites. But he loves her wit perhaps, and

this, you'll say, is more spiritual, more refined: not at all, if you examine it to the bottom. For what is that which nowadays passes under the name of wit? A bitter and ill-natured raillery, a pert repartee, or a confident talking at all; and in such a multitude of words, it's odds if something or other does not pass that is surprising, though every thing that surprises does not please; some things are wondered at for their ugliness, as well as others for their beauty. True wit, durst one venture to describe it, is quite another thing; it consists in such a sprightliness of imagination, such a reach and turn of thought, so properly expressed, as strikes and pleases a judicious taste.<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \*

Thus, whether it be wit or beauty that a man's in love with, there's no great hopes of a lasting happiness; beauty, with all the helps of art, is of no very lasting date; the more it is helped, the sooner it decays; and he, who only or chiefly chose for beauty, will in a little time find the same reason for another choice. Nor is that sort of wit which he prefers, of a more sure tenure; or allowing it to last, it will not always please. For that which has not a real excellency and value in itself entertains no longer than that giddy humor which recommended it to us holds; and when we can like on no just, or on very little ground, 'tis certain a dislike will arise, as lightly and as unaccountably. And it is not improbable that such a husband may in a little time, by ill usage, provoke such a wife to exercise her wit, that is, her spleen<sup>4</sup> on him, and then it is not hard to guess how very agreeable it will be to him.

\* \* \*

But do the women never choose amiss? Are the men only in fault? That is not pretended; for he who will be just must be forced to acknowledge that neither sex is always in the right. A woman, indeed, can't properly be said to choose; all that is allowed her, is to refuse or accept what is offered. And when we have made such

reasonable allowances as are due to the sex, perhaps they may not appear so much in fault as one would at first imagine, and a generous spirit will find more occasion to pity than to reprove. But sure I transgress—it must not be supposed that the ladies can do amiss! He is but an ill-bred fellow who pretends that they need amendment! They are, no doubt on't, always in the right, and most of all when they take pity on distressed lovers; whatever they *say* carries an authority that no reason can resist, and all that they *do* must needs be exemplary! This is the modish language, nor is there a man of honor amongst the whole tribe that would not venture his life, nay and his salvation too, in their defense, if any but himself attempts to injure them. But I must ask pardon if I can't come up to these heights, nor flatter them with the having no faults, which is only a malicious way of continuing and increasing their mistakes.

\* \* \*

But, alas! what poor woman is ever taught that she should have a higher design than to get her a husband? Heaven will fall in of course; and if she make but an obedient and dutiful wife, she cannot miss of it. A husband indeed is thought by both sexes so very valuable, that scarce a man who can keep himself clean and make a bow, but thinks he is good enough to pretend<sup>5</sup> to any woman; no matter for the difference of birth or fortune, a husband is such a wonder-working name as to make an equality, or something more, whenever it is pronounced.

\* \* \*

To wind up this matter: if a woman were duly principled and taught to know the world, especially the true sentiments that men have of her, and the traps they lay for her under so many gilded compliments, and such a seemingly great respect, that disgrace would be prevented which is brought upon too many families; women would marry more discreetly, and demean<sup>6</sup> themselves better in a married state than some people say they do.

\* \* \*

But some sage persons may perhaps object, that were women allowed to improve themselves, and not, amongst other discouragements, driven back by the wise jests and scoffs that are put upon a woman of sense or learning, a philosophical lady, as she is called by way of ridicule, they would be too wise, and too good for the men. I grant it, for vicious and foolish men. Nor is it to be wondered that he is afraid he should not be able to govern them were their understandings improved, who is resolved not to take too much pains with his own. But these, 'tis to be hoped, are no very considerable number, the foolish at least; and therefore this is so far from being an argument against their improvement, that it is a strong one for it, if we do but suppose the men to be as capable of improvement as the women; but much more if, according to tradition, we believe they have greater capacities. This, if anything, would stir them up to be what they ought, not permit them to waste their time and abuse their faculties in the service of their irregular appetites and unreasonable desires, and so let poor contemptible women, who have been their slaves, excel them in all that is truly excellent. This would make them blush at employing an immortal mind no better than in making provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof, since women, by a wiser conduct, have brought themselves to such a reach of thought, to such exactness of judgment, such clearness and strength of reasoning, such purity and elevation of mind, such command of their passions, such regularity of will and affection, and, in a word, to such a pitch of perfection as the human soul is capable of attaining even in this life by the grace of God; such true wisdom, such real greatness, as though it does not qualify them to make a noise in this world, to found or overturn empires, yet it qualifies them for what is infinitely better, a Kingdom that cannot be moved, an incorruptible crown of glory.

\* \* \*

Again, it may be said, if a wife's case be as it is here represented, it is not good for a woman to marry, and so there's an end of human race. But this is no fair consequence, for all that can justly be inferred from hence is that a woman has no mighty obligations to the man who makes love to her; she has no reason to be fond of being a wife, or to reckon it a piece of preferment when she is taken to be a man's upper-servant;<sup>7</sup> it is no advantage to her in this world; if rightly managed it may prove one as to the next. For she who marries purely to do good, to educate souls for heaven, who can be so truly mortified as to lay aside her own will and desires, to pay such an entire submission for life, to one whom she cannot be sure will always deserve it, does certainly perform a more heroic action than all the famous masculine heroes can boast of; she suffers a continual martyrdom to bring glory to God, and benefit to mankind; which consideration indeed may carry her through all difficulties, I know not what else can, and engage her to love him who proves perhaps so much worse than a brute, as to make this condition yet more grievous than it needed to be. She has need of a strong reason, of a truly Christian and well-tempered spirit, of all the assistance the best education can give her, and ought to have some good assurance of her own firmness and virtue, who ventures on such a trial; and for this reason 'tis less to be wondered at that women marry off in haste, for perhaps if they took time to consider and reflect upon it, they seldom would.

## Endnotes

1700

- Note 1: The text is from the first edition.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Social position. "Competency": sufficient income.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Compare with Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* 2.297–304 (p. 527).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Bad temper.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Aspire or lay claim.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Behave.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: High-ranking servant. “Preferment”: advancement in rank. [Return to reference 7](#)

## ***From A Preface, in Answer to Some Objections to Reflections upon Marriage***

\* \* \*

[T]his design, which is unfortunately accused of being so destructive to the government, of the men I mean, is entirely her own.<sup>1</sup> She neither advised with friends, nor turned over <sup>2</sup> ancient or modern authors, nor prudently submitted to the correction of such as are, or such as *think* they are good judges, but with an *English* spirit and genius set out upon the forlorn hope, meaning no hurt to anybody, nor designing any thing but the public good, and to retrieve, if possible, the native liberty, the rights and privileges of the subject.

Far be it from her to stir up sedition of any sort, none can abhor it more; and she heartily wishes that our masters<sup>3</sup> would pay their civil and ecclesiastical governors the same submission which they themselves exact from their domestic subjects. Nor can she imagine how she any way undermines the masculine empire or blows the trumpet of rebellion to the moiety<sup>4</sup> of mankind. Is it by exhorting women not to expect to have their own will in any thing, but to be entirely submissive when once they have made choice of a lord and master, though he happen not to be so wise, so kind, or even so just a governor as was expected?<sup>5</sup> She did not indeed advise them to think his folly wisdom, nor his brutality that love and worship he promised in his matrimonial oath, for this required a flight of wit and sense much above her poor ability, and proper only to masculine understandings. However she did not in any manner prompt them to resist or to abdicate the perjured spouse, though the laws of God and the land make special provision for it in a case wherein, as is to be feared, few men can truly plead not guilty.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*



If mankind had never sinned, reason would always have been obeyed, there would have been no struggle for dominion, and brutal power would not have prevailed. But in the lapsed state of mankind, and now that men will not be guided by their reason but by their appetites, and do not what they *ought* but what they *can*, the reason, or that which stands for it, the will and pleasure of the governor, is to be the reason of those who will not be guided by their own, and must take place for order's sake, although it should not be conformable to right reason. Nor can there be any society great or little, from empires down to private families, without a last resort to determine the affairs of the society by an irresistible sentence.<sup>7</sup> Now unless this supremacy be fixed somewhere, there will be a perpetual contention about it, such is the love of dominion; and let the reason of things be what it may, those who have least force or cunning to supply it<sup>8</sup> will have the disadvantage. So that since women are acknowledged to have least bodily strength, their being commanded to obey is in pure kindness to them, and for their quiet and security, as well as for the exercise of their virtue.<sup>9</sup> But does it follow that domestic governors have more sense than their subjects, any more than that other governors have? We do not find any man thinks the worse of his own understanding because another has superior power; or concludes himself less capable of a post of honor and authority because he is not preferred<sup>1</sup> to it. How much time would lie on men's hands, how empty would the places of concourse be, and how silent most companies, did men forbear to censure their governors; that is, in effect, to think themselves wiser. Indeed, government would be much more desirable than it is did it invest the possessor with a superior understanding as well as power. And if mere power gives a right to rule, there can be no such thing as usurpation; but a highway-man, so long as he has strength to force, has also a right to require our obedience.

Again, if absolute sovereignty be not necessary in a state, how comes it to be so in a family? or if in a family why not in a state; since no reason can be alleged for the one that will not hold more strongly for the other? If the authority of the husband, so far as it

extends, is sacred and inalienable, why not of the prince? The domestic sovereign is without dispute elected,<sup>2</sup> and the stipulations and contracts are mutual. Is it not then partial<sup>3</sup> in men to the last degree to contend for and practice that arbitrary dominion in their families which they abhor and exclaim against in the state? For if arbitrary power is evil in itself, and an improper method of governing rational and free agents, it ought not to be practiced anywhere. Nor is it less but rather more mischievous in families than in kingdoms, by how much 100,000 tyrants are worse than one. What though a husband can't deprive a wife of life without being responsible to the law, he may however do what is much more grievous to a generous mind, render life miserable, for which she has no redress, scarce pity, which is afforded to every other complainant; it being thought a wife's duty to suffer everything without complaint. If *all men are born free*, how is it that all women are born slaves? as they must be if the being subjected to the *inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will* of men be the *perfect condition of slavery*? and if the essence of freedom consists, as our masters say it does, in having *a standing rule to live by*?<sup>4</sup> And why is slavery so much condemned and strove against in one case and so highly applauded and held so necessary and so sacred in another?

\* \* \*

Again, men are possessed of all places of power, trust, and profit; they make laws and exercise the magistracy. Not only the sharpest sword, but even all the swords and blunderbusses are theirs, which by the strongest logic in the world gives them the best title to everything they please to claim as their prerogative. Who shall contend with them? Immemorial prescription<sup>5</sup> is on their side in these parts of the world, ancient tradition and modern usage! Our fathers have all along both taught and practiced superiority over the weaker sex, and consequently women are by nature inferior to men, as was to be demonstrated. An argument which must be

acknowledged unanswerable; for as well as I love my sex, I will not pretend a reply to *such* demonstration!

Only let me beg to be informed, to whom we poor fatherless maids and widows who have lost their masters owe subjection? It can't be to all men in general, unless all men were agreed to give the same commands. Do we then fall as strays to the first who finds us? By the maxims of some men and the conduct of some women, one would think so. But whoever he be that thus happens to become our master, if he allows us to be reasonable creatures and does not merely compliment us with that title, since no man denies our readiness to use our tongues, it would tend I should think to our master's advantage, and therefore he may please to be advised, to teach us to improve our reason. But if reason is only allowed us by way of raillery, and the secret maxim is that we have none, or little more than brutes, 'tis the best way to confine us with chain and block to the chimney-corner, which probably might save the estates of some families and the honor of others.

I do not propose this to prevent a rebellion, for women are not so well united as to form an insurrection. They are for the most part wise enough to love their chains and to discern how very becomingly they set. They think as humbly of themselves as their masters can wish with respect to the other sex, but in regard to their own they have a spice of masculine ambition: every one would lead, and none would follow—both sexes being too apt to envy and too backward in emulating, and take more delight in detracting from their neighbor's virtue than in improving their own. And therefore as to those women who find themselves born for slavery and are so sensible of their own meanness as to conclude it impossible to attain to anything excellent, since they are or ought to be best acquainted with their own strength and genius, she's a fool who would attempt their deliverance or improvement. No, let them enjoy the great honor and felicity of their tame, submissive, and depending temper! Let the men applaud and let them glory in this wonderful humility! Let them receive the flatteries and grimaces of the other sex, live unenvied by their own, and be as much beloved as one such woman can afford

to love another! Let them enjoy the glory of treading in the footsteps of their predecessors, and of having the prudence to avoid that audacious attempt of soaring beyond their sphere! Let them housewife<sup>6</sup> or play, dress, and be pretty entertaining company! Or, which is better, relieve the poor to ease their own compassions, read pious books, say their prayers and go to church, because they have been taught and used to do so, without being able to give a better reason for their faith and practice! Let them not by any means aspire at being women of understanding, because no man can endure a woman of superior sense or would treat a reasonable woman civilly, but that he thinks he stands on higher ground and that she is so wise as to make exceptions in his favor and to take her measures by his directions. They may pretend to sense indeed since mere pretences only render one the more ridiculous! Let them in short be what is called *very* women, for this is most acceptable to all sorts of men; or let them aim at the title of *good devout* women, since some men can bear with this; but let them not judge of the sex by their own scantling.<sup>7</sup> For the great Author of nature and fountain of all perfection never designed that the mean and imperfect, but that the most complete and excellent, of his creatures in every kind should be the standard to the rest.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1706

- Note 1: As in earlier editions, Astell does not put her name on the third edition's title page, but she here affirms that she, the author, is a woman (referring to herself in the third person).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ransacked.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Men in general, masters of women.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Half; here referring to the female half of humankind.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Astell advises in the body of *Some Reflections upon Marriage* that women accept their marriages, no matter how tyrannical their husbands are.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In Astell's time, both ecclesiastical and civil law allowed wives the right to petition for legal separation (not divorce) from husbands who were egregiously physically cruel to them.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, no society can subsist without vesting power in some ultimate authority that incontrovertibly decides contentious questions.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: To occupy the place of supremacy.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Here Astell presents the crucial link between her politics and her feminism: women must look favorably on absolute sovereignty because political instability threatens them, the weakest members of society, the most.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Promoted.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The wife "elects" her husband when she consents to marry him.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Unfair, or biased.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The last three italicized phrases quote the first and third paragraphs of the chapter "Of Slavery" (sections 22 and 24) from Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (p. 930).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Title or claim based on long possession.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Perform domestic duties.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Small ability.[Return to reference 7](#)

# **WILLIAM CONGREVE**

## **1670–1729**

Both of William Congreve's parents came from well-to-do and prominent county families. His father, a younger son, obtained a commission as lieutenant in the army and moved to Ireland in 1674. There the future playwright was educated at Kilkenny School and Trinity College, Dublin; at both places he was a younger contemporary of Swift. In 1691 he took rooms in the Middle Temple in London and began to study law, but soon found he preferred the wit of the coffeehouses and the theater. Within a year he had so distinguished himself at Will's Coffeehouse that he had become intimate with the great Dryden himself, and his brief career as a dramatist began shortly thereafter.

The success of *The Old Bachelor* (produced in 1693) immediately established him as the most promising young dramatist in London. It had the then phenomenally long run of fourteen days, and Dryden declared it the best first play he had ever read. *The Double Dealer* (produced in 1693) was a near failure, though it evoked one of Dryden's most graceful and gracious poems, in which he praised Congreve as the superior of Jonson and Fletcher and the equal of Shakespeare. *Love for Love* (produced in 1695) was an unqualified success and remains Congreve's most frequently revived play. In 1697 he brought out a well-received tragedy, *The Mourning Bride*. Congreve's most elegant comedy of manners, *The Way of the World*, received a brilliant production in 1700, but it did not have a long run.

During the rest of his life he wrote no more plays. Instead he held a minor government post, which, although a Whig, he was allowed to keep during the Tory ministry of Oxford and Bolingbroke; after the accession of George I he was given a more lucrative government sinecure. Despite the political animosities of the first two decades of the century, he managed to remain on friendly terms with Swift and Pope, and Pope dedicated to him his translation of the *Iliad*. Congreve's final years were perplexed by poor health but were made bearable by the love of Henrietta, second Duchess of Marlborough, whose last child, a daughter, was in all probability the playwright's.

*The Way of the World* is one of the wittiest plays ever written, a play to read slowly and savor. Like an expert jeweler, Congreve polished the Restoration comedy of manners to its ultimate sparkle and gloss. The dialogue is epigrammatic and brilliant, the plot is an intricate puzzle, and the characters shine with surprisingly complex facets. Yet the play is not all dazzling surface; it also has depths. Most Restoration comedies begin with the struggle for power, sex, and money and end with a marriage. In an age that viewed property, not romance, as the basis of marriage, the hero shows his prowess by catching an heiress. *The Way of the World* reflects that standard plot; it is a battle more over a legacy than over a woman, a battle in which sexual attraction is used as a weapon. Yet Congreve, writing after such conventions had been thoroughly explored, reveals the weakness of those who treat love as a war or a game: "each deceiver to his cost may find / That marriage frauds too oft are paid in kind." If "the way of the world" is cynical self-interest, it is also the worldly prudence that sees through the ruses of power and turns them to better ends. In this world generosity and affection win the day and true love conquers—with the help of some clever plotting.

At the center of the action are four fully realized characters—Mirabell and Millamant, the hero and heroine, and Fainall and Mrs. Marwood, the two villains—whose stratagems and relations move the play. Around them are characters who serve in one way or another as foils: Witwoud, the would-be wit, with whom we contrast

the true wit of Mirabell and Millamant; Petulant, a “humor” character, who affects bluff candor and cynical realism, but succeeds only in being offensive; and Sir Wilfull Witwoud, the booby squire from the country, who serves with Petulant to throw into relief the high good breeding and fineness of nature of the protagonists. Finally there is one of Congreve’s most striking creations, Lady Wishfort (“wish for it”), who though aging still longs for love, gallantry, and courtship and who is led by her appetites into the trap that Mirabell lays for her.

Because of the complexity of the plot, a summary of the situation at the play’s opening may prove helpful. Mirabell (a reformed rake) is sincerely in love with and wishes to marry Millamant, who, though a coquette and a highly sophisticated wit, is a virtuous woman. Mirabell some time before has married off his former mistress, the daughter of Lady Wishfort, to his friend Fainall. Fainall has grown tired of his wife and has been squandering her money on his mistress, Mrs. Marwood. In order to gain access to Millamant, Mirabell has pretended to pay court to the elderly and amorous Lady Wishfort, who is the guardian of Millamant and as such controls half her fortune. But his game has been spoiled by Mrs. Marwood, who nourishes a secret love for Mirabell and, to separate him from Millamant, has made Lady Wishfort aware of Mirabell’s duplicity. Lady Wishfort now loathes Mirabell for making a fool of her—an awkward situation, because if Millamant should marry without her guardian’s consent she would lose half her fortune, and Mirabell cannot afford to marry any but a rich wife. It is at this point that the action begins. Mirabell perfects a plot to get such power over Lady Wishfort as to force her to agree to the marriage, while Millamant continues to doubt whether she wishes to marry at all.



# The Way of the World

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE<sup>1</sup>

### *Men*

FAINALL, *in love with* MRS. MARWOOD

MIRABELL, *in love with* MRS. MILLAMANT

WITWOUD

PETULANT

}

*followers of* MRS. MILLAMANT

SIR WILFULL WITWOUD, *half brother to* WITWOUD, *and nephew to* LADY WISHFORT

WAITWELL, *servant to* MIRABELL

### *Women*

LADY WISHFORT, *enemy to* MIRABELL, *for having falsely pretended love to her*

MRS. MILLAMANT, *a fine lady, niece to* LADY WISHFORT, *and loves* MIRABELL

MRS. MARWOOD, *friend to* MR. FAINALL, *and likes* MIRABELL

MRS. FAINALL, *daughter to* LADY WISHFORT, *and wife to* FAINALL, *formerly friend to* MIRABELL

FOIBLE, *woman to* LADY WISHFORT

MINCING, *woman to* MRS. MILLAMANT

BETTY, *waitress at the chocolate house*

PEG, *under-servant to* LADY WISHFORT

DANCERS, FOOTMEN, *and* ATTENDANTS

SCENE—*London*

## Endnotes

- Note 1:

As was conventional in the period's plays, the names of the principal characters reveal their dominant traits: for example, Fainall would *fain* have *all*, with perhaps also the suggestion that he is the complete hypocrite, who *feigns*. Witwoud is the *would-be wit*. Wishfort suggests *wish for it*. Millamant is the lady with a thousand lovers (French *mille amants*). Marwood *would* willingly *mar* (injure) the lovers. Mincing has an air of affected gentility (that is, she *minces*), which clashes with her vulgar English. "Mrs." is "Mistress," a title then used by young unmarried ladies as well as by the married Mrs. Fainall.

[Return to reference 1](#)

## ***Prologue***

SPOKEN BY MR. BETTERTON<sup>2</sup>

Of those few fools, who with ill stars are cursed,  
Sure scribbling fools, called poets, fare the worst:  
For they're a sort of fools which Fortune makes,  
And after she has made 'em fools, forsakes.  
With nature's oafs 'tis quite a different case,  
For Fortune favors all her idiot race.  
In her own nest the cuckoo eggs we find,  
O'er which she broods to hatch the changeling kind.<sup>3</sup>  
No portion for her own she has to spare,  
So much she dotes on her adopted care.

Poets are bubbles,<sup>o</sup> by the town drawn in,  
Suffered at first some trifling stakes to win:  
But what unequal hazards do they run!  
Each time they write they venture all they've won:  
The squire that's buttered still,<sup>o</sup> is sure to be undone.  
This author, heretofore, has found your favor,  
But pleads no merit from his past behavior;  
To build on that might prove a vain presumption,  
Should grants to poets made, admit resumption:<sup>4</sup>  
And in Parnassus<sup>5</sup> he must lose his seat,  
If that be found a forfeited estate.<sup>6</sup>

He owns,<sup>o</sup> with toil he wrought the following scenes,  
But if they're naught ne'er spare him for his pains:  
Damn him the more; have no commiseration  
For dullness on mature deliberation.  
He swears he'll not resent one hissed-off scene  
Nor, like those peevish wits, his play maintain,<sup>o</sup>  
Who, to assert their sense, your taste arraign.  
Some plot we think he has, and some new thought;  
Some humor too, no farce; but that's a fault.

Satire, he thinks, you ought not to expect,  
 For so reformed a town,<sup>2</sup> who dares correct?  
 To please, this time, has been his sole pretense,  
 He'll not instruct, lest it should give offense.  
 Should he by chance a knave or fool expose,  
 That hurts none here; sure here are none of those.  
 In short, our play shall (with your leave to show it)  
 Give you one instance of a passive poet  
 Who to your judgments yields all resignation;  
 So save or damn after your own discretion.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Thomas Betterton (ca. 1635–1710), the greatest actor of the period, played Fainall in the original production of this play.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Simpletons; children supposed to have been secretly exchanged in infancy for others. The cuckoo lays its eggs in the nests of other birds.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Crown could both grant and take back (“resume”) estates.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Greek mountain sacred to the Muses.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: *Seat* rhymed with *estate*; in the next couplet, *scenes* and *pains* rhymed. A few lines later *scene* is similarly pronounced to rhyme with *maintain*, and *fault* (the *l* being silent) is rhymed with *thought*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A sarcasm, directed against the general movement to reform manners and morals and, more particularly, against Jeremy Collier’s attack on actors and playwrights in his *Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage* (1698).[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *dupes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *constantly flattered*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *admits*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *defend*[Return to reference](#) °

## ***Act 1—A chocolate house***

MIRABELL *and* FAINALL *rising from cards*, BETTY *waiting*.

MIRABELL You are a fortunate man, Mr. Fainall.

FAINALL Have we done?

MIRABELL What you please. I'll play on to entertain you.

FAINALL No, I'll give you your revenge another time, when you are not so indifferent; you are thinking of something else now, and play too negligently. The coldness of a losing gamester lessens the pleasure of the winner. I'd no more play with a man that slighted his ill fortune than I'd make love to a woman who undervalued the loss of her reputation.

MIRABELL You have a taste extremely delicate, and are for refining on your pleasures.

FAINALL Prithee, why so reserved? Something has put you out of humor.

MIRABELL Not at all. I happen to be grave today, and you are gay; that's all.

FAINALL Confess, Millamant and you quarreled last night after I left you; my fair cousin has some humors that would tempt the patience of a stoic. What, some coxcomb came in, and was well received by her, while you were by?

MIRABELL Witwoud and Petulant; and what was worse, her aunt, your wife's mother, my evil genius; or to sum up all in her own name, my old Lady Wishfort came in.

FAINALL O, there it is then—she has a lasting passion for you, and with reason. What, then my wife was there?

MIRABELL Yes, and Mrs. Marwood and three or four more, whom I never saw before. Seeing me, they all put on their grave faces, whispered one another; then complained aloud of the vapors,<sup>8</sup> and after fell into a profound silence.

FAINALL They had a mind to be rid of you.

MIRABELL For which good reason I resolved not to stir. At last the good old lady broke through her painful taciturnity, with an invective against long visits. I would not have understood her, but

Millamant joining in the argument, I rose and with a constrained smile told her I thought nothing was so easy as to know when a visit began to be troublesome. She reddened and I withdrew, without expecting<sup>9</sup> her reply.

FAINALL You were to blame to resent what she spoke only in compliance with her aunt.

MIRABELL She is more mistress of herself than to be under the necessity of such a resignation.

FAINALL What? though half her fortune depends upon her marrying with my lady's approbation?

MIRABELL I was then in such a humor that I should have been better pleased if she had been less discreet.

FAINALL Now I remember, I wonder not they were weary of you: last night was one of their cabal<sup>1</sup> nights; they have 'em three times a week, and meet by turns, at one another's apartments, where they come together like the coroner's inquest, to sit upon the murdered reputations of the week. You and I are excluded; and it was once proposed that all the male sex should be excepted; but somebody moved that to avoid scandal there might be one man of the community; upon which Witwoud and Petulant were enrolled members.

MIRABELL And who may have been the foundress of this sect? My Lady Wishfort, I warrant, who publishes her detestation of mankind, and full of the vigor of fifty-five, declares for a friend and ratafia;<sup>2</sup> and let posterity shift for itself, she'll breed no more.

FAINALL The discovery of your sham addresses to her, to conceal your love to her niece, has provoked this separation. Had you dissembled better, things might have continued in the state of nature.<sup>3</sup>

MIRABELL I did as much as man could, with any reasonable conscience: I proceeded to the very last act of flattery with her, and was guilty of a song in her commendation. Nay, I got a friend to put her into a lampoon and compliment her with the imputation of an affair with a young fellow, which I carried so far that I told her the malicious town took notice that she was grown fat of a

sudden; and when she lay in of a dropsy, persuaded her she was reported to be in labor. The devil's in't, if an old woman is to be flattered further, unless a man should endeavor downright personally to debauch her; and that my virtue forbade me. But for the discovery of this amour, I am indebted to your friend, or your wife's friend, Mrs. Marwood.

FAINALL What should provoke her to be your enemy, unless she has made you advances, which you have slighted? Women do not easily forgive omissions of that nature.

MIRABELL She was always civil to me, till of late. I confess I am not one of those coxcombs who are apt to interpret a woman's good manners to her prejudice, and think that she who does not refuse 'em everything, can refuse 'em nothing.

FAINALL You are a gallant man, Mirabell; and though you may have cruelty enough not to satisfy a lady's longing, you have too much generosity not to be tender of her honor. Yet you speak with an indifference which seems to be affected, and confesses you are conscious of a negligence.

MIRABELL You pursue the argument with a distrust that seems to be unaffected, and confesses you are conscious of a concern for which the lady is more indebted to you than is your wife.

FAINALL Fie, fie, friend, if you grow censorious I must leave you.—  
I'll look upon the gamesters in the next room.

MIRABELL Who are they?

FAINALL Petulant and Witwoud. [*To BETTY.*] Bring me some chocolate. [*Exit FAINALL.*]

MIRABELL Betty, what says your clock?

BETTY Turned of the last canonical hour,<sup>4</sup> sir. [*Exit BETTY.*]

MIRABELL How pertinently the jade answers me! Ha? almost one a clock! [*Looking on his watch.*]—O, y'are come—  
[*Enter a FOOTMAN.*]

MIRABELL Well, is the grand affair over? You have been something tedious.<sup>5</sup>

FOOTMAN Sir, there's such coupling at Pancras<sup>6</sup> that they stand behind one another, as 'twere in a country dance. Ours was the



last couple to lead up; and no hopes appearing of dispatch, besides, the parson growing hoarse, we were afraid his lungs would have failed before it came to our turn; so we drove around to Duke's Place, and there they were riveted in a trice.

MIRABELL     So, so, you are sure they are married?

FOOTMAN     Married and bedded, sir. I am witness.

MIRABELL     Have you the certificate?

FOOTMAN     Here it is, sir.

MIRABELL     Has the tailor brought Waitwell's clothes home, and the new liveries?

FOOTMAN     Yes, sir.

MIRABELL     That's well. Do you go home again, d'ye hear, and adjourn the consummation till farther order. Bid Waitwell shake his ears, and Dame Partlet rustle up her feathers, and meet me at one a clock by Rosamond's Pond, that I may see her before she returns to her lady: and as you tender your ears,<sup>7</sup> be secret. [*Exit*

FOOTMAN.]

[*Re-enter* FAINALL, BETTY.]

FAINALL     Joy of your success, Mirabell; you look pleased.

MIRABELL     Aye, I have been engaged in a matter of some sort of mirth, which is not yet ripe for discovery. I am glad this is not a cabal night. I wonder, Fainall, that you who are married, and of consequence should be discreet, will suffer your wife to be of such a party.

FAINALL     Faith, I am not jealous. Besides, most who are engaged are women and relations; and for the men, they are of a kind too contemptible to give scandal.

MIRABELL     I am of another opinion. The greater the coxcomb, always the more the scandal: for a woman who is not a fool can have but one reason for associating with a man who is one.

FAINALL     Are you jealous as often as you see Witwoud entertained by Millamant?

MIRABELL     Of her understanding I am, if not of her person.

FAINALL     You do her wrong; for to give her her due, she has wit.

MIRABELL She has beauty enough to make any man think so; and complaisance enough not to contradict him who shall tell her so.

FAINALL For a passionate lover, methinks you are a man somewhat too discerning in the failings of your mistress.

MIRABELL And for a discerning man, somewhat too passionate a lover; for I like her with all her faults, nay, like her for her faults. Her follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her, and those affectations which in another woman would be odious, serve but to make her more agreeable. I'll tell thee, Fainall, she once used me with that insolence that in revenge I took her to pieces; sifted her, and separated her failings; I studied 'em, and got 'em by rote. The catalogue was so large that I was not without hopes, one day or other, to hate her heartily: to which end I so used myself to think of 'em that at length, contrary to my design and expectation, they gave me every hour less and less disturbance, till in a few days it became habitual to me to remember 'em without being displeased. They are now grown as familiar to me as my own frailties, and in all probability in a little time longer I shall like 'em as well.

FAINALL Marry her, marry her; be half as well acquainted with her charms as you are with her defects, and my life on't, you are your own man again.

MIRABELL Say you so?

FAINALL Aye, aye, I have experience; I have a wife, and so forth.

[*Enter a MESSENGER.*]

MESSENGER Is one Squire Witwoud here?

BETTY Yes. What's your business?

MESSENGER I have a letter for him, from his brother Sir Wilfull, which I am charged to deliver into his own hands.

BETTY He's in the next room, friend—that way. [*Exit MESSENGER.*]

MIRABELL What, is the chief of that noble family in town, Sir Wilfull Witwoud?

FAINALL He is expected today. Do you know him?

MIRABELL I have seen him. He promises to be an extraordinary person; I think you have the honor to be related to him.

FAINALL Yes; he is half brother to this Witwoud by a former wife, who was sister to my Lady Wishfort, my wife's mother. If you marry Millamant, you must call cousins too.

MIRABELL I had rather be his relation than his acquaintance.

FAINALL He comes to town in order to equip himself for travel.

MIRABELL For travel! Why the man that I mean is above forty.<sup>8</sup>

FAINALL No matter for that; 'tis for the honor of England that all Europe should know that we have blockheads of all ages.

MIRABELL I wonder there is not an Act of Parliament to save the credit of the nation, and prohibit the exportation of fools.

FAINALL By no means, 'tis better as 'tis; 'tis better to trade with a little loss than to be quite eaten up with being overstocked.

MIRABELL Pray, are the follies of this knight-errant, and those of the squire his brother, anything related?

FAINALL Not at all. Witwoud grows by the knight, like a medlar grafted on a crab.<sup>9</sup> One will melt in your mouth, and t'other set your teeth on edge; one is all pulp, and the other all core.

MIRABELL So one will be rotten before he be ripe, and the other will be rotten without ever being ripe at all.

FAINALL Sir Wilfull is an odd mixture of bashfulness and obstinacy. But when he's drunk, he's as loving as the monster in the *Tempest*,<sup>1</sup> and much after the same manner. To give t'other his due, he has something of good nature, and does not always want wit.

MIRABELL Not always; but as often as his memory fails him, and his commonplace of comparisons.<sup>2</sup> He is a fool with a good memory, and some few scraps of other folks' wit. He is one whose conversation can never be approved, yet it is now and then to be endured. He has indeed one good quality, he is not exceptious,<sup>3</sup> for he so passionately affects the reputation of understanding raillery that he will construe an affront into a jest; and call downright rudeness and ill language, satire and fire.

FAINALL If you have a mind to finish his picture, you have an opportunity to do it at full length. Behold the original.

[*Enter* WITWOUD.]

WITWOUD Afford me your compassion, my dears; pity me, Fainall,  
Mirabell, pity me.

MIRABELL I do from my soul.

FAINALL Why, what's the matter?

WITWOUD No letters for me, Betty?

BETTY Did not a messenger bring you one but now, sir?

WITWOUD Aye, but no other?

BETTY No, sir.

WITWOUD That's hard, that's very hard. A messenger, a mule, a  
beast of burden, he has brought me a letter from the fool my  
brother, as heavy as a panegyric in a funeral sermon, or a copy of  
commendatory verses from one poet to another. And what's  
worse, 'tis as sure a forerunner of the author as an epistle  
dedicatory.

MIRABELL A fool, and your brother, Witwoud!

WITWOUD Aye, aye, my half brother. My half brother he is, no  
nearer upon honor.

MIRABELL Then 'tis possible he may be but half a fool.

WITWOUD Good, good, Mirabell, *le drôle!*<sup>4</sup> Good, good. Hang him,  
don't let's talk of him. Fainall, how does your lady? Gad. I say  
anything in the world to get this fellow out of my head. I beg  
pardon that I should ask a man of pleasure and the town a  
question at once so foreign and domestic. But I talk like an old  
maid at a marriage, I don't know what I say: but she's the best  
woman in the world.

FAINALL 'Tis well you don't know what you say, or else your  
commendation would go near to make me either vain or jealous.

WITWOUD No man in town lives well with a wife but Fainall. Your  
judgment, Mirabell?

MIRABELL You had better step and ask his wife, if you would be  
credibly informed.

WITWOUD Mirabell.

MIRABELL Aye.

WITWOUD My dear, I ask ten thousand pardons—gad, I have forgot  
what I was going to say to you.

MIRABELL I thank you heartily, heartily.

WITWOUD No, but prithee excuse me—my memory is such a memory.

MIRABELL Have a care of such apologies, Witwoud—for I never knew a fool but he affected to complain, either of the spleen<sup>5</sup> or his memory.

FAINALL What have you done with Petulant?

WITWOUD He's reckoning his money—my money it was.—I have no luck today.

FAINALL You may allow him to win of you at play—for you are sure to be too hard for him at repartee. Since you monopolize the wit that is between you, the fortune must be his of course.

MIRABELL I don't find that Petulant confesses the superiority of wit to be your talent, Witwoud.

WITWOUD Come, come, you are malicious now, and would breed debates.—Petulant's my friend, and a very honest fellow, and a very pretty fellow, and has a smattering—faith and troth a pretty deal of an odd sort of a small wit: nay, I'll do him justice. I'm his friend, I won't wrong him.—And if he had any judgment in the world—he would not be altogether contemptible. Come, come, don't detract from the merits of my friend.

FAINALL You don't take your friend to be over-nicely bred.

WITWOUD No, no, hang him, the rogue has no manners at all, that I must own—no more breeding than a bum-bailey,<sup>6</sup> that I grant you.—'Tis pity; the fellow has fire and life.

MIRABELL What, courage?

WITWOUD Hum, faith I don't know as to that—I can't say as to that.—Yes, faith, in a controversy he'll contradict anybody.

MIRABELL Though 'twere a man whom he feared, or a woman whom he loved.

WITWOUD Well, well, he does not always think before he speaks—we have all our failings; you are too hard upon him, you are, faith. Let me excuse him—I can defend most of his faults, except one or two. One he has, that's the truth on't, if he were my brother, I could not acquit him.—That indeed I could wish were otherwise.

MIRABELL Aye marry, what's that, Witwoud?

WITWOUD O, pardon me—expose the infirmities of my friend?—No, my dear, excuse me there.

FAINALL What, I warrant he's unsincere, or 'tis some such trifle.

WITWOUD No, no, what if he be? 'Tis no matter for that, his wit will excuse that. A wit should no more be sincere than a woman constant; one argues a decay of parts<sup>7</sup> as t'other of beauty.

MIRABELL Maybe you think him too positive?

WITWOUD No, no, his being positive is an incentive to argument, and keeps up conversation.

FAINALL Too illiterate.

WITWOUD That! that's his happiness.—His want of learning gives him the more opportunities to show his natural parts.

MIRABELL He wants words.

WITWOUD Aye; but I like him for that now; for his want of words gives me the pleasure very often to explain his meaning.

FAINALL He's impudent.

WITWOUD No, that's not it.

MIRABELL Vain.

WITWOUD No.

MIRABELL What, he speaks unseasonable truths sometimes, because he has not wit enough to invent an evasion.

WITWOUD Truths! Ha, ha, ha! No, no, since you will have it—I mean, he never speaks truth at all—that's all. He will lie like a chambermaid, or a woman of quality's porter. Now that is a fault.

[*Enter* COACHMAN.]

COACHMAN Is Master Petulant here, mistress?

BETTY Yes.

COACHMAN Three gentlewomen in a coach would speak with him.

FAINALL O brave Petulant, three!

BETTY I'll tell him.

COACHMAN You must bring two dishes of chocolate and a glass of cinnamon water.

[*Exeunt* BETTY, COACHMAN.]

WITWOUD That should be for two fasting strumpets, and a bawd troubled with wind. Now you may know what the three are.

MIRABELL You are free with your friend's acquaintance.

WITWOUD Aye, aye, friendship without freedom is as dull as love without enjoyment, or wine without toasting; but to tell you a secret, these are trulls<sup>8</sup> whom he allows coach-hire, and something more by the week, to call on him once a day at public places.

MIRABELL How!

WITWOUD You shall see he won't go to 'em because there's no more company here to take notice of him.—Why this is nothing to what he used to do, before he found out this way. I have known him call for himself.—

FAINALL Call for himself? What dost thou mean?

WITWOUD Mean? Why he would slip you out of this chocolate house, just when you had been talking to him.—As soon as your back was turned—whip he was gone—then trip to his lodging, clap on a hood and scarf, and a mask, slap into a hackney coach, and drive hither to the door again in a trice; where he would send in for himself, that I mean, call for himself, wait for himself, nay and what's more, not finding himself, sometimes leave a letter for himself.

MIRABELL I confess this is something extraordinary.—I believe he waits for himself now, he is so long a-coming. O, I ask his pardon.

[*Enter* PETULANT, BETTY.]

BETTY Sir, the coach stays.

PETULANT Well, well; I come.—'Sbud,<sup>9</sup> a man had as good be a professed midwife, as a professed whoremaster, at this rate; to be knocked up and raised at all hours, and in all places. Pox on 'em, I won't come.—D'ye hear, tell 'em I won't come.—Let 'em snivel and cry their hearts out.

FAINALL You are very cruel, Petulant.

PETULANT All's one, let it pass—I have a humor to be cruel.

MIRABELL I hope they are not persons of condition<sup>1</sup> that you use at this rate.

PETULANT Condition, condition's a dried fig, if I am not in humor.—  
By this hand, if they were your—a—a—your what-dee-call-'ems  
themselves, they must wait or rub off,<sup>2</sup> if I want appetite.

MIRABELL What-de-call-ems! What are they, Witwoud?

WITWOUD Empresses, my dear.—By your what-dee-call-'ems he  
means sultana queens.

PETULANT Aye, Roxolanas.<sup>3</sup>

MIRABELL Cry you mercy.

FAINALL Witwoud says they are—

PETULANT What does he say th' are?

WITWOUD I? Fine ladies I say.

PETULANT Pass on, Witwoud.—Harkee, by this light his relations—  
two coheiresses his cousins, and an old aunt, who loves  
caterwauling better than a conventicle.<sup>4</sup>

WITWOUD Ha, ha, ha; I had a mind to see how the rogue would  
come off.—Ha, ha, ha; gad, I can't be angry with him, if he had  
said they were my mother and my sisters.

MIRABELL No!

WITWOUD No; the rogue's wit and readiness of invention charm me,  
dear Petulant.

BETTY They are gone, sir, in great anger.

PETULANT Enough, let 'em trundle.<sup>5</sup> Anger helps complexion, saves  
paint.<sup>6</sup>

FAINALL This continence is all dissembled; this is in order to have  
something to brag of the next time he makes court to Millamant,  
and swear he had abandoned the whole sex for her sake.

MIRABELL Have you not left off your impudent pretensions there  
yet? I shall cut your throat, sometime or other, Petulant, about  
that business.

PETULANT Aye, aye, let that pass.—There are other throats to be  
cut.—

MIRABELL Meaning mine, sir?

PETULANT Not I—I mean nobody—I know nothing. But there are  
uncles and nephews in the world—and they may be rivals—What  
then? All's one for that—



MIRABELL     How! Harkee, Petulant, come hither—explain, or I shall call your interpreter.

PETULANT     Explain? I know nothing.—Why, you have an uncle, have you not, lately come to town, and lodges by my Lady Wishfort's?

MIRABELL     True.

PETULANT     Why, that's enough.—You and he are not friends; and if he should marry and have a child, you may be disinherited, ha?

MIRABELL     Where hast thou stumbled upon all this truth?

PETULANT     All's one for that; why, then, say I know something.

MIRABELL     Come, thou art an honest fellow, Petulant, and shalt make love to my mistress, thou sha't, faith. What hast thou heard of my uncle?

PETULANT     I, nothing, I. If throats are to be cut, let swords clash; snug's the word, I shrug and am silent.

MIRABELL     O raillery, raillery. Come, I know thou art in the women's secrets.—What, you're a cabalist. I know you stayed at Millamant's last night, after I went. Was there any mention made of my uncle or me? Tell me; if thou hadst but good nature equal to thy wit, Petulant, Tony Witwoud, who is now thy competitor in fame, would show as dim by thee as a dead whiting's eye by a pearl of Orient. He would no more be seen by thee than Mercury is by the sun: come, I'm sure thou wo't tell me.

PETULANT     If I do, will you grant me common sense then, for the future?

MIRABELL     Faith, I'll do what I can for thee, and I'll pray that Heaven may grant it thee in the meantime.

PETULANT     Well, harkee.

[MIRABELL *and* PETULANT *talk privately.*]

FAINALL     Petulant and you both will find Mirabell as warm a rival as a lover.

WITWOUD     Pshaw, pshaw, that she laughs at Petulant is plain. And for my part—but that it is almost a fashion to admire her, I should—harkee—to tell you a secret, but let it go no further—between friends, I shall never break my heart for her.

FAINALL     How!

WITWOUD     She's handsome; but she's a sort of an uncertain woman.

FAINALL I thought you had died for her.

WITWOUD Umh—no—

FAINALL She has wit.

WITWOUD 'Tis what she will hardly allow anybody else.—Now, demme,<sup>7</sup> I should hate that, if she were as handsome as Cleopatra. Mirabell is not so sure of her as he thinks for.

FAINALL Why do you think so?

WITWOUD We stayed pretty late there last night, and heard something of an uncle to Mirabell, who is lately come to town—and is between him and the best part of his estate. Mirabell and he are at some distance, as my Lady Wishfort has been told; and you know she hates Mirabell, worse than a Quaker hates a parrot,<sup>8</sup> or than a fishmonger hates a hard frost. Whether this uncle has seen Mrs. Millamant or not, I cannot say; but there were items of such a treaty being in embryo; and if it should come to life, poor Mirabell would be in some sort unfortunately fobbed<sup>9</sup> i' faith.

FAINALL 'Tis impossible Millamant should harken to it.

WITWOUD Faith, my dear, I can't tell; she's a woman and a kind of a humorist.<sup>1</sup>

[MIRABELL, PETULANT *privately*.]

MIRABELL And this is the sum of what you could collect last night.

PETULANT The quintessence. Maybe Witwoud knows more, he stayed longer.—Besides they never mind him; they say anything before him.

MIRABELL I thought you had been the greatest favorite.

PETULANT Aye, *tête à tête*;<sup>2</sup> but not in public, because I make remarks.

MIRABELL You do?

PETULANT Aye, aye, pox, I'm malicious, man. Now he's soft, you know, they are not in awe of him.—The fellow's well bred, he's what you call a—what-d'ye-call-'em. A fine gentleman, but he's silly withal.

MIRABELL I thank you, I know as much as my curiosity requires. Fainall, are you for the Mall?<sup>3</sup>

FAINALL     Aye, I'll take a turn before dinner.

WITWOUD     Aye, we'll all walk in the park, the ladies talked of being there.

MIRABELL     I thought you were obliged to watch for your brother Sir Wilfull's arrival.

WITWOUD     No, no, he's come to his aunt's, my Lady Wishfort. Pox on him, I shall be troubled with him too. What shall I do with the fool?

PETULANT     Beg him for his estate, that I may beg you afterwards, and so have but one trouble with you both.

WITWOUD     O rare Petulant; thou art as quick as fire in a frosty morning; thou shalt to the Mall with us; and we'll be very severe.

PETULANT     Enough, I'm in a humor to be severe.

MIRABELL     Are you? Pray then walk by yourselves.—Let not us be accessory to your putting the ladies out of countenance with your senseless ribaldry, which you roar out aloud as often as they pass by you; and when you have made a handsome woman blush, then you think you have been severe.

PETULANT     What, what? Then let 'em either show their innocence by not understanding what they hear, or else show their discretion by not hearing what they would not be thought to understand.

MIRABELL     But hast not thou then sense enough to know that thou ought'st to be most ashamed thyself, when thou hast put another out of countenance?

PETULANT     Not I, by this hand.—I always take blushing either for a sign of guilt, or ill breeding.

MIRABELL     I confess you ought to think so. You are in the right, that you may plead the error of your judgment in defense of your practice.

Where modesty's ill manners, 'tis but fit  
That impudence and malice pass for wit.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Melancholy.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Awaiting.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Secret organization designed for intrigue.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A liqueur flavored with fruit kernels (pronounced *rat-a-fé-a*).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lady Wishfort's natural inclination for you would have continued.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The hours in which marriage can legally be performed in the Anglican Church, then eight to twelve noon.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Taken a long time.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Church of St. Pancras, like that of St. James in Duke's Place (referred to later in the same speech), was notorious for a thriving trade in unlicensed marriages.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: If you don't want your ears cropped. "Dame Partlet": Pertelote, the hen-wife of the cock Chauntecleer in Chaucer's *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. Rosamond's Pond is in St. James's Park.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The grand tour of the Continent was rapidly becoming a part of the education of gentlemen, but it was usually made in company with a tutor after a young man had graduated from a university, not after a man had passed the age of forty.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Crabapple. "Medlar": a fruit eaten when it is overripe.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Trinculo, in the adaptation of Shakespeare's *Tempest* by Sir William Davenant and Dryden (1667), having made Caliban drunk, says, "The poor monster is loving in his drink" (2.2).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: One recognized sign of wit was the ability to quickly discover resemblances between objects apparently unlike. Witwoud specializes in this kind of wit, but Mirabell suggests that they are all obvious and collected from others, like

observations copied in a notebook, or “commonplace” book.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Quarrelsome.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The witty fellow (French).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Depression.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Bum-bailiff, the lowest arresting officer.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Talents.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sex workers. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: God’s body.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: High social standing.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Go away.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: “Empresses,” “sultana queens,” and “Roxolanas” were terms for sex workers. Roxolana is the wife of the Sultan in Davenant’s *Siege of Rhodes* (1656).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Nonconformist religious meeting.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Move along.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Makeup.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Damn me.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In his *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (1678), the Quaker Robert Barclay says that professing belief in Christ without spiritual revelation is like “the prattling of a parrot.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Tricked.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A capricious person.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: face-to-face (French); that is, in private.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A walk in St. James’s Park, one of the fashionable public places of London.[Return to reference 3](#)

## ***Act 2—St. James's Park***

[*Enter* MRS. FAINALL *and* MRS. MARWOOD.]

MRS. FAINALL     Aye, aye, dear Marwood, if we will be happy, we must find the means in ourselves, and among ourselves. Men are ever in extremes; either doting or averse. While they are lovers, if they have fire and sense, their jealousies are insupportable: and when they cease to love (we ought to think at least) they loathe. They look upon us with horror and distaste; they meet us like the ghosts of what we were, and as from such, fly from us.

MRS. MARWOOD     True, 'tis an unhappy circumstance of life that love should ever die before us; and that the man so often should outlive the lover. But say what you will, 'tis better to be left than never to have been loved. To pass over youth in dull indifference, to refuse the sweets of life because they once must leave us, is as preposterous as to wish to have been born old, because we one day must be old. For my part, my youth may wear and waste, but it shall never rust in my possession.

MRS. FAINALL     Then it seems you dissemble an aversion to mankind only in compliance to my mother's humor.

MRS. MARWOOD     Certainly. To be free,<sup>4</sup> I have no taste of those insipid dry discourses with which our sex of force must entertain themselves apart from men. We may affect endearments to each other, profess eternal friendships, and seem to dote like lovers; but 'tis not in our natures long to persevere. Love will resume his empire in our breasts, and every heart, or soon or late, receive and readmit him as its lawful tyrant.

MRS. FAINALL     Bless me, how have I been deceived! Why, you profess<sup>5</sup> a libertine.

MRS. MARWOOD     You see my friendship by my freedom. Come, be as sincere, acknowledge that your sentiments agree with mine.

MRS. FAINALL     Never.

MRS. MARWOOD     You hate mankind?

MRS. FAINALL     Heartily, inveterately.

MRS. MARWOOD     Your husband?

MRS. FAINALL Most transcendently; aye, though I say it,  
meritoriously.

MRS. MARWOOD Give me your hand upon it.

MRS. FAINALL There.

MRS. MARWOOD I join with you. What I have said has been to try  
you.

MRS. FAINALL Is it possible? Dost thou hate those vipers men?

MRS. MARWOOD I have done hating 'em, and am now come to  
despise 'em; the next thing I have to do is eternally to forget 'em.

MRS. FAINALL There spoke the spirit of an Amazon, a Penthesilea.<sup>6</sup>

MRS. MARWOOD And yet I am thinking sometimes to carry my  
aversion further.

MRS. FAINALL How?

MRS. MARWOOD Faith, by marrying. If I could but find one that loved  
me very well, and would be thoroughly sensible of ill usage, I  
think I should do myself the violence of undergoing the ceremony.

MRS. FAINALL You would not make him a cuckold?

MRS. MARWOOD No; but I'd make him believe I did, and that's as  
bad.

MRS. FAINALL Why had not you as good do it?

MRS. MARWOOD O, if he should ever discover it, he would then know  
the worst, and be out of his pain; but I would have him ever to  
continue upon the rack of fear and jealousy.

MRS. FAINALL Ingenious mischief! Would thou wert married to  
Mirabell.

MRS. MARWOOD Would I were.

MRS. FAINALL You change color.

MRS. MARWOOD Because I hate him.

MRS. FAINALL So do I; but I can hear him named. But what reason  
have you to hate him in particular?

MRS. MARWOOD I never loved him; he is and always was insufferably  
proud.

MRS. FAINALL By the reason you give for your aversion, one would  
think it dissembled; for you have laid a fault to his charge of which  
his enemies must acquit him.

MRS. MARWOOD O then it seems you are one of his favorable enemies. Methinks you look a little pale, and now you flush again.

MRS. FAINALL Do I? I think I am a little sick o' the sudden.

MRS. MARWOOD What ails you?

MRS. FAINALL My husband. Don't you see him? He turned short upon me unawares, and has almost overcome me.

[*Enter FAINALL and MIRABELL.*]

MRS. MARWOOD Ha, ha, ha; he comes opportunely for you.

MRS. FAINALL For you, for he has brought Mirabell with him.

FAINALL My dear.

MRS. FAINALL My soul.

FAINALL You don't look well today, child.

MRS. FAINALL D'ye think so?

MIRABELL He is the only man that does, madam.

MRS. FAINALL The only man that would tell me so at least; and the only man from whom I could hear it without mortification.

FAINALL O my dear, I am satisfied of your tenderness; I know you cannot resent anything from me, especially what is an effect of my concern.

MRS. FAINALL Mr. Mirabell, my mother interrupted you in a pleasant relation last night. I would fain hear it out.

MIRABELL The persons concerned in that affair have yet a tolerable reputation.—I am afraid Mr. Fainall will be censorious.

MRS. FAINALL He has a humor more prevailing than his curiosity, and will willingly dispense with the hearing of one scandalous story to avoid giving an occasion to make another by being seen to walk with his wife. This way, Mr. Mirabell, and I dare promise you will oblige us both.

[*Exeunt MIRABELL and MRS. FAINALL.*]

FAINALL Excellent creature! Well, sure if I should live to be rid of my wife, I should be a miserable man.

MRS. MARWOOD Aye!

FAINALL For having only that one hope, the accomplishment of it of consequence must put an end to all my hopes; and what a wretch is he who must survive his hopes! Nothing remains when that day



comes but to sit down and weep like Alexander, when he wanted other worlds to conquer.

MRS. MARWOOD Will you not follow 'em?

FAINALL Faith, I think not.

MRS. MARWOOD Pray let us; I have a reason.

FAINALL You are not jealous?

MRS. MARWOOD Of whom?

FAINALL Of Mirabell.

MRS. MARWOOD If I am, is it inconsistent with my love to you that I am tender of your honor?

FAINALL You would intimate then, as if there were a fellow-feeling between my wife and him.

MRS. MARWOOD I think she does not hate him to that degree she would be thought.

FAINALL But he, I fear, is too insensible.<sup>7</sup>

MRS. MARWOOD It may be you are deceived.

FAINALL It may be so. I do now begin to apprehend it.

MRS. MARWOOD What?

FAINALL That I have been deceived, Madam, and you are false.

MRS. MARWOOD That I am false! What mean you?

FAINALL To let you know I see through all your little arts.—Come, you both love him; and both have equally dissembled your aversion. Your mutual jealousies of one another have made you clash till you have both struck fire. I have seen the warm confession reddening on your cheeks, and sparkling from your eyes.

MRS. MARWOOD You do me wrong.

FAINALL I do not.—'Twas for my ease to oversee<sup>8</sup> and willfully neglect the gross advances made him by my wife; that by permitting her to be engaged I might continue unsuspected in my pleasures; and take you oftener to my arms in full security. But could you think, because the nodding husband would not wake, that e'er the watchful lover slept?

MRS. MARWOOD And wherewithal can you reproach me?

FAINALL With infidelity, with loving another, with love of Mirabell.

MRS. MARWOOD 'Tis false. I challenge you to show an instance that can confirm your groundless accusation. I hate him.

FAINALL And wherefore do you hate him? He is insensible, and your resentment follows his neglect. An instance! The injuries you have done him are a proof: your interposing in his love. What cause had you to make discoveries of his pretended passion? To undeceive the credulous aunt, and be the officious obstacle of his match with Millamant?

MRS. MARWOOD My obligations to my lady<sup>9</sup> urged me. I had professed a friendship to her, and could not see her easy nature so abused by that dissembler.

FAINALL What, was it conscience then? Professed a friendship! O the pious friendships of the female sex!

MRS. MARWOOD More tender, more sincere, and more enduring than all the vain and empty vows of men, whether professing love to us, or mutual faith to one another.

FAINALL Ha, ha, ha; you are my wife's friend too.

MRS. MARWOOD Shame and ingratitude! Do you reproach me? You, you upbraid me! Have I been false to her, through strict fidelity to you, and sacrificed my friendship to keep my love inviolate? And have you the baseness to charge me with the guilt, unmindful of the merit! To you it should be meritorious that I have been vicious: and do you reflect that guilt upon me, which should lie buried in your bosom?

FAINALL You misinterpret my reproof. I meant but to remind you of the slight account you once could make of strictest ties, when set in competition with your love to me.

MRS. MARWOOD 'Tis false, you urged it with deliberate malice.—'Twas spoke in scorn, and I never will forgive it.

FAINALL Your guilt, not your resentment, begets your rage. If yet you loved, you could forgive a jealousy, but you are stung to find you are discovered.

MRS. MARWOOD It shall be all discovered. You too shall be discovered; be sure you shall. I can but be exposed.—If I do it myself, I shall prevent<sup>1</sup> your baseness.

FAINALL Why, what will you do?

MRS. MARWOOD Disclose it to your wife; own what has passed between us.

FAINALL Frenzy!

MRS. MARWOOD By all my wrongs I'll do't—I'll publish to the world the injuries you have done me, both in my fame and fortune: with both I trusted you, you bankrupt in honor, as indigent of wealth.

FAINALL Your fame<sup>2</sup> I have preserved. Your fortune has been bestowed as the prodigality of your love would have it, in pleasures which we both have shared. Yet, had not you been false, I had e'er this repaid it.—'Tis true—had you permitted Mirabell with Millamant to have stolen their marriage, my lady had been incensed beyond all means of reconciliation: Millamant had forfeited the moiety<sup>3</sup> of her fortune, which then would have descended to my wife—and wherefore did I marry, but to make lawful prize of a rich widow's wealth, and squander it on love and you?

MRS. MARWOOD Deceit and frivolous pretense.

FAINALL Death, am I not married? What's pretense? Am I not imprisoned, fettered? Have I not a wife? Nay, a wife that was a widow, a young widow, a handsome widow; and would be again a widow, but that I have a heart of proof,<sup>4</sup> and something of a constitution to bustle through the ways of wedlock and this world. Will you yet be reconciled to truth and me?

MRS. MARWOOD Impossible. Truth and you are inconsistent—I hate you, and shall forever.

FAINALL For loving you?

MRS. MARWOOD I loathe the name of love after such usage; and next to the guilt with which you would asperse me, I scorn you most. Farewell.

FAINALL Nay, we must not part thus.

MRS. MARWOOD Let me go.

FAINALL Come, I'm sorry.

MRS. MARWOOD I care not.—Let me go.—Break my hands, do—I'd leave 'em to get loose.

FAINALL I would not hurt you for the world. Have I no other hold to keep you here?

MRS. MARWOOD Well, I have deserved it all.

FAINALL You know I love you.

MRS. MARWOOD Poor dissembling!—O that—Well, it is not yet—

FAINALL What? What is it not? What is it not yet? It is not yet too late—

MRS. MARWOOD No, it is not yet too late—I have that comfort.

FAINALL It is, to love another.

MRS. MARWOOD But not to loathe, detest, abhor mankind, myself, and the whole treacherous world.

FAINALL Nay, this is extravagance.—Come, I ask your pardon.—No tears.—I was to blame. I could not love you and be easy in my doubts.—Pray forbear.—I believe you; I'm convinced I've done you wrong; and any way, every way will make amends.—I'll hate my wife yet more, damn her, I'll part with her, rob her of all she's worth, and we'll retire somewhere, anywhere, to another world. I'll marry thee.—Be pacified.—'Sdeath, they come, hide your face, your tears.—You have a mask,<sup>5</sup> wear it a moment. This way, this way, be persuaded. [*Exeunt* FAINALL *and* MRS. MARWOOD.]

[*Enter* MIRABELL *and* MRS. FAINALL.]

MRS. FAINALL They are here yet.

MIRABELL They are turning into the other walk.

MRS. FAINALL While I only hated my husband, I could bear to see him, but since I have despised him, he's too offensive.

MIRABELL O, you should hate with prudence.

MRS. FAINALL Yes, for I have loved with indiscretion.

MIRABELL You should have just so much disgust for your husband as may be sufficient to make you relish your lover.

MRS. FAINALL You have been the cause that I have loved without bounds, and would you set limits to that aversion, of which you have been the occasion? Why did you make me marry this man?

MIRABELL Why do we daily commit disagreeable and dangerous actions? To save that idol, reputation. If the familiarities of our loves had produced that consequence, of which you were

apprehensive, where could you have fixed a father's name with credit, but on a husband? I knew Fainall to be a man lavish of his morals, an interested and professing friend, a false and a designing lover; yet one whose wit and outward fair behavior have gained a reputation with the town, enough to make that woman stand excused who has suffered herself to be won by his addresses. A better man ought not to have been sacrificed to the occasion; a worse had not answered to the purpose. When you are weary of him, you know your remedy.

MRS. FAINALL I ought to stand in some degree of credit with you, Mirabell.

MIRABELL In justice to you, I have made you privy to my whole design, and put it in your power to ruin or advance my fortune.

MRS. FAINALL Whom have you instructed to represent your pretended uncle?

MIRABELL Waitwell, my servant.

MRS. FAINALL He is an humble servant to Foible,<sup>6</sup> my mother's woman, and may win her to your interest.

MIRABELL Care is taken for that.—She is won and worn by this time. They were married this morning.

MRS. FAINALL Who?

MIRABELL Waitwell and Foible. I would not tempt my servant to betray me by trusting him too far. If your mother, in hopes to ruin me, should consent to marry my pretended uncle, he might, like Mosca in *The Fox*, stand upon terms;<sup>7</sup> so I made him sure beforehand.

MRS. FAINALL So, if my poor mother is caught in a contract, you will discover the imposture betimes; and release her by producing a certificate of her gallant's former marriage.

MIRABELL Yes, upon condition that she consent to my marriage with her niece, and surrender the moiety of her fortune in her possession.

MRS. FAINALL She talked last night of endeavoring at a match between Millamant and your uncle.

MIRABELL That was by Foible's direction, and my instruction, that she might seem to carry it more privately.

MRS. FAINALL Well, I have an opinion of your success, for I believe my lady will do anything to get an husband; and when she has this, which you have provided for her, I suppose she will submit to anything to get rid of him.

MIRABELL Yes, I think the good lady would marry anything that resembled a man, though 'twere no more than what a butler could pinch out of a napkin.

MRS. FAINALL Female frailty! We must all come to it, if we live to be old, and feel the craving of a false appetite when the true is decayed.

MIRABELL An old woman's appetite is depraved like that of a girl—'tis the greensickness<sup>8</sup> of a second childhood; and like the faint offer of a latter spring, serves but to usher in the fall and withers in an affected bloom.

MRS. FAINALL Here's your mistress.

[*Enter* MRS. MILLAMANT, WITWOUD, *and* MINCING.]

MIRABELL Here she comes, i'faith, full sail, with her fan spread and streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders.—Ha, no, I cry her mercy.

MRS. FAINALL I see but one poor empty sculler, and he tows her woman after him.

MIRABELL You seem to be unattended, madam.—You used to have the *beau monde* throng after you; and a flock of gay fine perukes<sup>9</sup> hovering round you.

WITWOUD Like moths about a candle—I had like to have lost my comparison for want of breath.

MILLAMANT O, I have denied myself airs today. I have walked as fast through the crowd—

WITWOUD As a favorite just disgraced; and with as few followers.

MILLAMANT Dear Mr. Witwoud, truce with your similitudes: For I am as sick of 'em—

WITWOUD As a physician of a good air—I cannot help it, madam, though 'tis against myself.

MILLAMANT Yet again! Mincing, stand between me and his wit.

WITWOUD Do, Mrs. Mincing, like a screen before a great fire. I confess I do blaze today, I am too bright.

MRS. FAINALL But dear Millamant, why were you so long?

MILLAMANT Long! Lord, have I not made violent haste? I have asked every living thing I met for you; I have inquired after you, as after a new fashion.

WITWOUD Madam, truce with your similitudes.—No, you met her husband, and did not ask him for her.

MIRABELL By your leave, Witwoud, that were like inquiring after an old fashion, to ask a husband for his wife.

WITWOUD Hum, a hit, a hit, a palpable hit,<sup>1</sup> I confess it.

MRS. FAINALL You were dressed before I came abroad.

MILLAMANT Aye, that's true.—O, but then I had—Mincing, what had I? Why was I so long?

MINCING O mem, your la'ship stayed to peruse a packet of letters.

MILLAMANT O, aye, letters—I had letters—I am persecuted with letters—I hate letters.—Nobody knows how to write letters; and yet one has 'em, one does not know why.—They serve one to pin up one's hair.

WITWOUD Is that the way? Pray, madam, do you pin up your hair with all your letters? I find I must keep copies.

MILLAMANT Only with those in verse, Mr. Witwoud. I never pin up my hair with prose. I think I tried once, Mincing.

MINCING O mem, I shall never forget it.

MILLAMANT Aye, poor Mincing tiffed<sup>2</sup> and tiffed all the morning.

MINCING Till I had the cramp in my fingers, I'll vow, mem. And all to no purpose. But when your la'ship pins it up with poetry, it sits so pleasant the next day as anything, and is so pure and so crips.<sup>3</sup>

WITWOUD Indeed, so crips?

MINCING You're such a critic, Mr. Witwoud.

MILLAMANT Mirabell, did not you take exceptions last night? O, aye, and went away.—Now I think on't I'm angry.—No, now I think on't I'm pleased—for I believe I gave you some pain.

MIRABELL Does that please you?



MILLAMANT Infinitely; I love to give pain.

MIRABELL You would affect a cruelty which is not in your nature; your true vanity is in the power of pleasing.

MILLAMANT O, I ask your pardon for that—one's cruelty is one's power, and when one parts with one's cruelty, one parts with one's power; and when one has parted with that, I fancy one's old and ugly.

MIRABELL Aye, aye, suffer your cruelty to ruin the object of your power, to destroy your lover.—And then how vain, how lost a thing you'll be! Nay, 'tis true: you are no longer handsome when you've lost your lover; your beauty dies upon the instant: for beauty is the lover's gift; 'tis he bestows your charms—your glass is all a cheat. The ugly and the old, whom the looking glass mortifies, yet after commendation can be flattered by it, and discover beauties in it: for that reflects our praises, rather than your face.

MILLAMANT O, the vanity of these men! Fainall, d'ye hear him? If they did not commend us, we were not handsome! Now you must know they could not commend one, if one was not handsome. Beauty the lover's gift?—Lord, what is a lover, that it can give? Why, one makes lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases: and then if one pleases one makes more.

WITWOUD Very pretty. Why, you make no more of making of lovers, madam, than of making so many card-matches.<sup>4</sup>

MILLAMANT One no more owes one's beauty to a lover than one's wit to an echo.—They can but reflect what we look and say; vain empty things if we are silent or unseen, and want a being.

MIRABELL Yet, to those two vain empty things, you owe two of the greatest pleasures of your life.

MILLAMANT How so?

MIRABELL To your lover you owe the pleasure of hearing yourselves praised; and to an echo the pleasure of hearing yourselves talk.

WITWOUD But I know a lady that loves talking so incessantly she won't give an echo fair play; she has that everlasting rotation of



tongue, that an echo must wait till she dies before it can catch her last words.

MILLAMANT O, fiction; Fainall, let us leave these men.

MIRABELL [*Aside to* MRS. FAINALL.] Draw off Witwoud.

MRS. FAINALL Immediately; I have a word or two for Mr. Witwoud.

[*Exeunt* WITWOUD *and* MRS. FAINALL.]

MIRABELL I would beg a little private audience too.—You had the tyranny to deny me last night, though you knew I came to impart a secret to you that concerned my love.

MILLAMANT You saw I was engaged.

MIRABELL Unkind. You had the leisure to entertain a herd of fools, things who visit you from their excessive idleness, bestowing on your easiness that time, which is the encumbrance of their lives. How can you find delight in such society? It is impossible they should admire you, they are not capable: or if they were, it should be to you as a mortification; for sure to please a fool is some degree of folly.

MILLAMANT I please myself—besides, sometimes to converse with fools is for my health.

MIRABELL Your health! Is there a worse disease than the conversation of fools?

MILLAMANT Yes, the vapors; fools are physic for it, next to asafetida.<sup>5</sup>

MIRABELL You are not in a course<sup>6</sup> of fools?

MILLAMANT Mirabell, if you persist in this offensive freedom, you'll displease me. I think I must resolve after all not to have you.—We shan't agree.

MIRABELL Not in our physic, it may be.

MILLAMANT And yet our distemper in all likelihood will be the same, for we shall be sick of one another. I shan't endure to be reprimanded nor instructed; 'tis so dull to act always by advice, and so tedious to be told of one's faults.—I can't bear it. Well, I won't have you, Mirabell—I'm resolved—I think—you may go—ha, ha, ha. What would you give that you could help loving me?

MIRABELL I would give something that you did not know I could not help it.

MILLAMANT Come, don't look grave then. Well, what do you say to me?

MIRABELL I say that a man may as soon make a friend by his wit, or a fortune by his honesty, as win a woman with plain-dealing and sincerity.

MILLAMANT Sententious Mirabell! prithee don't look with that violent and inflexible wise face, like Solomon at the dividing of the child in an old tapestry hanging.<sup>7</sup>

MIRABELL You are merry, madam, but I would persuade you for a moment to be serious.

MILLAMANT What, with that face? No, if you keep your countenance, 'tis impossible I should hold mine. Well, after all, there is something very moving in a lovesick face. Ha, ha, ha.—Well I won't laugh, don't be peevish—heigho! Now I'll be melancholy, as melancholy as a watchlight.<sup>8</sup> Well, Mirabell, if ever you will win me, woo me now. Nay, if you are so tedious, fare you well; I see they are walking away.

MIRABELL Can you not find in the variety of your disposition one moment—

MILLAMANT To hear you tell me Foible's married and your plot like to speed.—No.

MIRABELL But how you came to know it—

MILLAMANT Without the help of the devil, you can't imagine; unless she should tell me herself. Which of the two it may have been, I will leave you to consider; and when you have done thinking of that, think of me.

[*Exeunt* MILLAMANT *and* MINCING.]

MIRABELL I have something more.—Gone!—Think of you! To think of a whirlwind, though 'twere in a whirlwind, were a case of more steady contemplation, a very tranquility of mind and mansion. A fellow that lives in a windmill has not a more whimsical dwelling than the heart of a man that is lodged in a woman. There is no point of the compass to which they cannot turn, and by which

they are not turned; and by one as well as another, for motion, not method, is their occupation. To know this, and yet continue to be in love, is to be made wise from the dictates of reason, and yet persevere to play the fool by the force of instinct. O, here come my pair of turtles<sup>9</sup>—what, billing so sweetly! Is not Valentine's Day over with you yet?

[*Enter WAITWELL and FOIBLE.*]

MIRABELL Sirrah<sup>1</sup> Waitwell, why sure you think you were married for your own recreation and not for my conveniency.

WAITWELL Your pardon, sir. With submission, we have indeed been solacing in lawful delights, but still with an eye to business, sir. I have instructed her as well as I could. If she can take your directions as readily as my instructions, sir, your affairs are in a prosperous way.

MIRABELL Give you joy, Mrs. Foible.

FOIBLE O-las, sir, I'm so ashamed—I'm afraid my lady has been in a thousand inquietudes for me. But I protest, sir, I made as much haste as I could.

WAITWELL That she did indeed, sir. It was my fault that she did not make more.

MIRABELL That I believe.

FOIBLE But I told my lady as you instructed me, sir. That I had a prospect of seeing Sir Rowland your uncle, and that I would put her ladyship's picture in my pocket to show him; which I'll be sure to say has made him so enamored of her beauty that he burns with impatience to lie at her ladyship's feet and worship the original.

MIRABELL Excellent, Foible! Matrimony has made you eloquent in love.

WAITWELL I think she has profited, sir. I think so.

FOIBLE You have seen Madam Millamant, sir?

MIRABELL Yes.

FOIBLE I told her, sir, because I did not know that you might find an opportunity; she had so much company last night.

MIRABELL Your diligence will merit more—in the meantime—

[*Gives money.*]

FOIBLE O dear sir, your humble servant.

WAITWELL Spouse.

MIRABELL Stand off, sir, not a penny. Go on and prosper, Foible. The lease shall be made good and the farm stocked if we succeed.<sup>2</sup>

FOIBLE I don't question your generosity, sir. And you need not doubt of success. If you have no more commands, sir, I'll be gone; I'm sure my lady is at her toilet,<sup>3</sup> and can't dress till I come. O dear, I'm sure that [*Looking out.*] was Mrs. Marwood that went by in a mask; if she has seen me with you I'm sure she'll tell my lady. I'll make haste home and prevent her.<sup>4</sup> Your servant, sir. B'w'y,<sup>5</sup> Waitwell. [*Exit FOIBLE.*]

WAITWELL Sir Rowland, if you please. The jade's so pert upon her preferment she forgets herself.

MIRABELL Come, sir, will you endeavor to forget yourself—and transform into Sir Rowland.

WAITWELL Why, sir, it will be impossible I should remember myself—married, knighted, and attended<sup>6</sup> all in one day! 'Tis enough to make any man forget himself. The difficulty will be how to recover my acquaintance and familiarity with my former self; and fall from my transformation to a reformation into Waitwell. Nay, I shan't be quite the same Waitwell neither—for now I remember me, I'm married and can't be my own man again.

Aye, there's my grief; that's the sad change of life;  
To lose my title, and yet keep my wife.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: To speak freely.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Talk like.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Queen of the Amazons (a legendary nation of women warriors).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Indifferent.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Overlook.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Lady Wishfort.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Anticipate.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Good name.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Half.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, a proved or tempered heart.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Often worn in public places by fashionable women of the time to preserve their complexions; they were also useful to disguise a woman and so to protect her reputation when she was carrying on an illicit affair.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: He is Foible's lover.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: To insist on conditions; here, to blackmail. "Mosca": the scheming parasite in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, who in the end tries to blackmail Volpone.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The anemia that sometimes affects girls at puberty.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Periwigs, worn by fashionable men (see Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* 1.101). "Beau monde": fashionable world (French).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An allusion to the dueling scene in *Hamlet* 5.2.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dressed the hair.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A dialectal form of "crisp," curly.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Matches made by dipping pieces of card in melted sulfur.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A foul-smelling resin used for medicinal purposes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Plan of medical treatment.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Judgment of Solomon (1 Kings 3:16–27) was a favorite subject in painting and tapestry.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Nightlight.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, turtledoves, remarkable for their affectionate billing and cooing. Birds were popularly supposed to choose their mates on St. Valentine's Day.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Form of address to an inferior.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Mirabell has promised to lease a farm for the couple for helping him.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Vanity, makeup table.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Arrive before she does.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A shortened form of “God be with you” (our word *good-bye*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: By servants.[Return to reference 6](#)

### **Act 3—A room in LADY WISHFORT's house**

LADY WISHFORT *at her toilet, PEG waiting.*

LADY WISHFORT Merciful, no news of Foible yet?

PEG No, madam.

LADY WISHFORT I have no more patience. If I have not fretted myself till I am pale again, there's no veracity in me. Fetch me the red—the red, do you hear, sweetheart? An errant ash color, as I'm a person. Look you how this wench stirs! Why dost thou not fetch me a little red? Didst thou not hear me, mopus?<sup>7</sup>

PEG The red ratafia does your ladyship mean, or the cherry brandy?

LADY WISHFORT Ratafia, fool. No, fool. Not the ratafia, fool. Grant me patience! I mean the Spanish paper,<sup>8</sup> idiot—complexion, darling. Paint, paint, paint, dost thou understand that, changeling, dangling thy hands like bobbins before thee? Why dost thou not stir, puppet? Thou wooden thing upon wires.

PEG Lord, madam, your ladyship is so impatient.—I cannot come at the paint, madam. Mrs. Foible has locked it up and carried the key with her.

LADY WISHFORT A pox take you both!—Fetch me the cherry brandy then. [*Exit PEG.*] I'm as pale and as faint, I look like Mrs. Qualmsick, the curate's wife, that's always breeding. Wench, come, come, wench, what art thou doing? Sipping? Tasting? Save thee, dost thou not know the bottle?

[*Re-enter PEG with a bottle and china cup.*]

PEG Madam, I was looking for a cup.

LADY WISHFORT A cup, save thee, and what a cup hast thou brought! Dost thou take me for a fairy, to drink out of an acorn? Why didst thou not bring thy thimble? Hast thou ne'er a brass thimble clinking in thy pocket with a bit of nutmeg? I warrant thee. Come, fill, fill.—So—again. See who that is.—[*A knock is heard.*—] Set down the bottle first. Here, here, under the table.—What, wouldst thou go with the bottle in thy hand like a tapster?<sup>9</sup> As I'm a person, this wench has lived in an inn upon the road before she

came to me, like Maritornes the Asturian<sup>1</sup> in *Don Quixote*. No Foible yet?

PEG No, madam, Mrs. Marwood.

LADY WISHFORT O Marwood, let her come in. Come in, good Marwood.

[*Enter* MRS. MARWOOD.]

MRS. MARWOOD I'm surprised to find your ladyship in *deshabille*<sup>2</sup> at this time of day.

LADY WISHFORT Foible's a lost thing; has been abroad since morning, and never heard of since.

MRS. MARWOOD I saw her but now, as I came masked through the park, in conference with Mirabell.

LADY WISHFORT With Mirabell! you call my blood into my face, with mentioning that traitor. She durst not have the confidence. I sent her to negotiate an affair, in which if I'm detected I'm undone. If that wheedling villain has wrought upon Foible to detect me, I'm ruined. O my dear friend, I'm a wretch of wretches if I'm detected.

MRS. MARWOOD O madam, you cannot suspect Mrs. Foible's integrity.

LADY WISHFORT O, he carries poison in his tongue that would corrupt integrity itself. If she has given him an opportunity, she has as good as put her integrity into his hands. Ah dear Marwood, what's integrity to an opportunity? Hark! I hear her—dear friend, retire into my closet,<sup>3</sup> that I may examine her with more freedom. You'll pardon me, dear friend, I can make bold with you. There are books over the chimney—Quarles and Prynne, and the *Short View of the Stage*,<sup>4</sup> with Bunyan's works to entertain you. [*Exit* MRS. MARWOOD; *to* PEG.] Go, you thing, and send her in. [*Exit* PEG.]

[*Enter* FOIBLE.]

LADY WISHFORT O Foible, where hast thou been? What hast thou been doing?

FOIBLE Madam, I have seen the party.

LADY WISHFORT But what hast thou done?

FOIBLE Nay, 'tis your ladyship has done, and are to do; I have only promised. But a man so enamored—so transported! Well, if worshiping of pictures be a sin—poor Sir Rowland, I say.



LADY WISHFORT The miniature has been counted like<sup>5</sup>—but hast thou not betrayed me, Foible? Hast thou not detected me to that faithless Mirabell?—What hadst thou to do with him in the park? Answer me, has he got nothing out of thee?

FOIBLE [*Aside.*] So, the devil has been beforehand with me. What shall I say?—Alas, madam, could I help it if I met that confident thing? Was I in fault? If you had heard how he used me, and all upon your ladyship's account, I'm sure you would not suspect my fidelity. Nay, if that had been the worst I could have borne; but he had a fling at your ladyship too; and then I could not hold; but i' faith I gave him his own.

LADY WISHFORT Me? What did the filthy fellow say?

FOIBLE O madam; 'tis a shame to say what he said—with his taunts and his fleers,<sup>6</sup> tossing up his nose. Humh (says he) what, you are a-hatching some plot (says he) you are so early abroad, or catering (says he), ferreting for some disbanded<sup>7</sup> officer, I warrant—half pay is but thin subsistence (says he).—Well, what pension does your lady propose? Let me see (says he) what, she must come down pretty deep now, she's superannuated (says he) and—

LADY WISHFORT Ods my life, I'll have him—I'll have him murdered. I'll have him poisoned. Where does he eat? I'll marry a drawer<sup>8</sup> to have him poisoned in his wine. I'll send for Robin from Locket's<sup>9</sup>—immediately.

FOIBLE Poison him? Poisoning's too good for him. Starve him, madam, starve him; marry Sir Rowland, and get him disinherited. O, you would bless yourself, to hear what he said.

LADY WISHFORT A villain!—superannuated!

FOIBLE Humh (says he) I hear you are laying designs against me too (says he) and Mrs. Millamant is to marry my uncle; (he does not suspect a word of your ladyship) but (says he) I'll fit you for that, I warrant you (says he) I'll hamper you for that (says he) you and your old frippery<sup>1</sup> too (says he). I'll handle you—

LADY WISHFORT Audacious villain! handle me, would he durst—frippery? old frippery! Was there ever such a foul-mouthed fellow? I'll be married tomorrow, I'll be contracted tonight.

FOIBLE The sooner the better, madam.

LADY WISHFORT Will Sir Rowland be here, say'st thou? When, Foible?

FOIBLE Incontinently, madam. No new sheriff's wife expects the return of her husband after knighthood, with that impatience in which Sir Rowland burns for the dear hour of kissing your ladyship's hand after dinner.

LADY WISHFORT Frippery! Superannuated frippery! I'll frippery the villain, I'll reduce him to frippery and rags. A tatterdemalion—I hope to see him hung with tatters, like a Long Lane penthouse,<sup>2</sup> or a gibbet-thief. A slander-mouthed railer—I warrant the spendthrift prodigal's in debt as much as the million lottery, or the whole court upon a birthday. I'll spoil his credit with his tailor. Yes, he shall have my niece with her fortune, he shall.

FOIBLE He! I hope to see him lodge in Ludgate first, and angle into Black-friars for brass farthings with an old mitten.<sup>3</sup>

LADY WISHFORT Aye, dear Foible; thank thee for that, dear Foible. He has put me out of all patience. I shall never recompose my features to receive Sir Rowland with any economy of face. This wretch has fretted me that I am absolutely decayed. Look, Foible.

FOIBLE Your ladyship has frowned a little too rashly, indeed, madam. There are some cracks discernible in the white varnish.

LADY WISHFORT Let me see the glass.—Cracks, say'st thou? Why I am arrantly flayed—I look like an old peeled wall. Thou must repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes, or I shall never keep up to my picture.

FOIBLE I warrant you, madam; a little art once made your picture like you and now a little of the same art must make you like your picture. Your picture must sit for you, madam.

LADY WISHFORT But art thou sure Sir Rowland will not fail to come? Or will a' not fail<sup>4</sup> when he does come? Will he be importunate, Foible, and push? For if he should not be importunate—I shall never break decorums.—I shall die with confusion, if I am forced to advance.—Oh, no, I can never advance.—I shall swoon if he should expect advances. No, I hope Sir Rowland is better bred than to put a lady to the necessity of breaking her forms. I won't

be too coy neither—I won't give him despair—but a little disdain is not amiss; a little scorn is alluring.

FOIBLE A little scorn becomes your ladyship.

LADY WISHFORT Yes, but tenderness becomes me best.—A sort of dyingness—You see that picture has a sort of a—Ha, Foible? A swimmingness in the eyes—Yes, I'll look so—my niece affects it; but she wants features.<sup>5</sup> Is Sir Rowland handsome? Let my toilet be removed—I'll dress above. I'll receive Sir Rowland here. Is he handsome? Don't answer me. I won't know: I'll be surprised. I'll be taken by surprise.

FOIBLE By storm, madam. Sir Rowland's a brisk man.

LADY WISHFORT Is he! O, then he'll importune, if he's a brisk man, I shall save decorums if Sir Rowland importunes. I have a mortal terror at the apprehension of offending against decorums. O, I'm glad he's a brisk man. Let my things be removed, good Foible.  
[*Exit* LADY WISHFORT.]

[*Enter* MRS. FAINALL.]<sup>6</sup>

MRS. FAINALL O Foible, I have been in a fright, lest I should come too late. That devil Marwood saw you in the park with Mirabell, and I'm afraid will discover it to my lady.

FOIBLE Discover what, madam?

MRS. FAINALL Nay, nay, put not on that strange face. I am privy to the whole design and know Waitwell, to whom thou wert this morning married, is to personate<sup>7</sup> Mirabell's uncle, and as such, winning my lady, to involve her in those difficulties from which Mirabell only must release her, by his making his conditions to have my cousin and her fortune left to her own disposal.

FOIBLE O dear madam, I beg your pardon. It was not my confidence in your ladyship that was deficient, but I thought the former good correspondence between your ladyship and Mr. Mirabell might have hindered his communicating this secret.

MRS. FAINALL Dear Foible, forget that.

FOIBLE O dear madam, Mr. Mirabell is such a sweet winning gentleman—but your ladyship is the pattern of generosity. Sweet lady, to be so good! Mr. Mirabell cannot choose but to be grateful.

I find your ladyship has his heart still. Now, madam, I can safely tell your ladyship our success. Mrs. Marwood had told my lady; but I warrant I managed myself. I turned it all for the better. I told my lady that Mr. Mirabell railed at her. I laid horrid things to his charge, I'll vow; and my lady is so incensed that she'll be contracted to Sir Rowland tonight, she says—I warrant I worked her up, that he may have her for asking for, as they say of a Welsh maidenhead.

MRS. FAINALL O rare Foible!

FOIBLE Madam, I beg your ladyship to acquaint Mr. Mirabell of his success. I would be seen as little as possible to speak to him—besides, I believe Madam Marwood watches me. She has a month's mind,<sup>8</sup> but I know Mr. Mirabell can't abide her. [*Calls.*] John, remove my lady's toilet. Madam, your servant. My lady is so impatient, I fear she'll come for me if I stay.

MRS. FAINALL I'll go with you up the back stairs, lest I should meet her.

[*Exeunt* MRS. FAINALL, FOIBLE.]

[*Enter* MRS. MARWOOD.]

MRS. MARWOOD Indeed, Mrs. Engine,<sup>9</sup> is it thus with you? Are you become a go-between of this importance? Yes, I shall watch you. Why, this wench is the *passe-partout*, a very master key to everybody's strongbox. My friend Fainall,<sup>1</sup> have you carried it so swimmingly? I thought there was something in it; but it seems it's over with you. Your loathing is not from a want of appetite, then, but from a surfeit. Else you could never be so cool to fall from a principal to be an assistant; to procure for him! A pattern of generosity, that I confess. Well, Mr. Fainall, you have met with your match. O, man, man! Woman, woman! The devil's an ass: If I were a painter, I would draw him like an idiot, a driveler with a bib and bells. Man should have his head and horns, and woman the rest of him. Poor simple fiend! Madam Marwood has a month's mind, but he can't abide her.—'Twere better for him you had not been his confessor in that affair without you could have kept his counsel closer. I shall not prove another pattern of generosity.—He

has not obliged me to that with those excesses of himself; and now I'll have none of him. Here comes the good lady, panting ripe, with a heart full of hope and a head full of care, like any chemist upon the day of projection.<sup>2</sup>

[*Enter* LADY WISHFORT.]

LADY WISHFORT O dear Marwood, what shall I say for this rude forgetfulness—but my dear friend is all goodness.

MRS. MARWOOD No apologies, dear madam. I have been very well entertained.

LADY WISHFORT As I'm a person I am in a very chaos to think I should so forget myself—but I have such an olio<sup>3</sup> of affairs really I know not what to do—[*Calls.*] Foible—I expect my nephew Sir Wilfull every moment too.—Why, Foible!—He means to travel for improvement.

MRS. MARWOOD Methinks Sir Wilfull should rather think of marrying than traveling at his years. I hear he is turned of forty.

LADY WISHFORT O, he's in less danger of being spoiled by his travels.—I am against my nephew's marrying too young. It will be time enough when he comes back and has acquired discretion to choose for himself.

MRS. MARWOOD Methinks Mrs. Millamant and he would make a very fit match. He may travel afterwards. 'Tis a thing very usual with young gentlemen.

LADY WISHFORT I promise you I have thought on't—and since 'tis your judgment, I'll think on't again. I assure you I will; I value your judgment extremely. On my word I'll propose it.

[*Enter* FOIBLE.]

LADY WISHFORT Come, come Foible—I had forgot my nephew will be here before dinner.—I must make haste.

FOIBLE Mr. Witwoud and Mr. Petulant are come to dine with your ladyship.

LADY WISHFORT O dear, I can't appear till I am dressed. Dear Marwood, shall I be free with you again and beg you to entertain 'em? I'll make all imaginable haste. Dear friend, excuse me.

[*Exeunt* LADY WISHFORT *and* FOIBLE.]

[*Enter* MRS. MILLAMANT *and* MINCING.]

MILLAMANT Sure never anything was so unbred as that odious man.  
—Marwood, your servant.

MRS. MARWOOD You have a color. What's the matter?

MILLAMANT That horrid fellow Petulant has provoked me into a flame  
—I have broke my fan.—Mincing, lend me yours; is not all the  
powder out of my hair?

MRS. MARWOOD No. What has he done?

MILLAMANT Nay, he has done nothing; he has only talked.—Nay, he  
has said nothing neither; but he has contradicted everything that  
has been said. For my part, I thought Witwoud and he would have  
quarreled.

MINCING I vow, mem, I thought once they would have fit.<sup>4</sup>

MILLAMANT Well, 'tis a lamentable thing, I swear, that one has not  
the liberty of choosing one's acquaintance as one does one's  
clothes.

MRS. MARWOOD If we had that liberty, we should be as weary of one  
set of acquaintance, though never so good, as we are of one suit,  
though never so fine. A fool and a doily stuff<sup>5</sup> would now and then  
find days of grace, and be worn for variety.

MILLAMANT I could consent to wear 'em, if they would wear alike;  
but fools never wear out—they are such drap-de-Berry<sup>6</sup> things!  
Without one could give 'em to one's chambermaid after a day or  
two.

MRS. MARWOOD 'Twere better so indeed. Or what think you of the  
play house?<sup>7</sup> A fine gay glossy fool should be given there, like a  
new masking habit after the masquerade is over, and we have  
done with the disguise. For a fool's visit is always a disguise, and  
never admitted by a woman of wit, but to blind her affair with a  
lover of sense. If you would but appear barefaced now and own  
Mirabell, you might as easily put off Petulant and Witwoud as your  
hood and scarf. And indeed 'tis time, for the town has found it:  
the secret is grown too big for the pretense: 'tis like Mrs. Primly's  
great belly; she may lace it down before, but it burnishes<sup>8</sup> on her  
hips. Indeed, Millamant, you can no more conceal it than my Lady

Strammel can her face, that goodly face, which in defiance of her Rhenish-wine tea will not be comprehended in a mask.<sup>9</sup>

MILLAMANT I'll take my death, Marwood, you are more censorious than a decayed beauty, or a discarded toast.<sup>1</sup> Mincing, tell the men they may come up. My aunt is not dressing here; their folly is less provoking than your malice. [*Exit MINCING.*] "The town has found it." What has it found? That Mirabell loves me is no more a secret than it is a secret that you discovered it to my aunt, or than the reason why you discovered it is a secret.

MRS. MARWOOD You are nettled.

MILLAMANT You're mistaken. Ridiculous!

MRS. MARWOOD Indeed, my dear, you'll tear another fan if you don't mitigate those violent airs.

MILLAMANT O silly! Ha, ha, ha. I could laugh immoderately. Poor Mirabell! His constancy to me has quite destroyed his complaisance for all the world beside. I swear, I never enjoined him, to be so coy.—If I had the vanity to think he would obey me, I would command him to show more gallantry.—'Tis hardly well bred to be so particular on one hand and so insensible on the other. But I despair to prevail, and so let him follow his own way. Ha, ha, ha. Pardon me, dear creature, I must laugh, ha, ha, ha; though I grant you 'tis a little barbarous, ha, ha, ha.

MRS. MARWOOD What pity 'tis, so much fine raillery, and delivered with so significant gesture, should be so unhappily directed to miscarry.

MILLAMANT Ha? Dear creature, I ask your pardon—I swear I did not mind you.

MRS. MARWOOD Mr. Mirabell and you both may think it a thing impossible, when I shall tell him by telling you—

MILLAMANT O dear, what? For it is the same thing, if I hear it—Ha, ha, ha.

MRS. MARWOOD That I detest him, hate him, madam.

MILLAMANT O madam, why so do I—and yet the creature loves me, ha, ha, ha. How can one forbear laughing to think of it?—I am a sibyl<sup>2</sup> if I am not amazed to think what he can see in me. I'll take



my death, I think you are handsomer—and within a year or two as young. If you could but stay for me, I should overtake you.—But that cannot be.—Well, that thought makes me melancholy.—Now I'll be sad.

MRS. MARWOOD    Your merry note may be changed sooner than you think.

MILLAMANT    D'ye say so? Then I'm resolved I'll have a song to keep up my spirits.

[*Enter* MINCING.]

MINCING    The gentlemen stay but to comb,<sup>3</sup> madam, and will wait on you.

MILLAMANT    Desire Mrs. —<sup>4</sup> that is in the next room to sing the song I would have learnt yesterday. You shall hear it, madam—not that there's any great matter in it—But 'tis agreeable to my humor.

**[*Song. Set by Mr. John Eccles*]**

**1**

Love's but the frailty of the mind,  
When 'tis not with ambition joined;  
A sickly flame, which if not fed expires;  
And feeding, wastes in self-consuming fires.

**2**

'Tis not to wound a wanton boy  
Or amorous youth, that gives the joy;  
But 'tis the glory to have pierced a swain,  
For whom inferior beauties sighed in vain.

**3**

Then I alone the conquest prize,  
When I insult a rival's eyes:  
If there's delight in love, 'tis when I see  
That heart which others bleed for, bleed for me.

[*Enter* PETULANT, WITWOUD.]



MILLAMANT Is your animosity composed, gentlemen?

WITWOUD Raillery, raillery, madam, we have no animosity. We hit off a little wit now and then, but no animosity. The falling out of wits is like the falling out of lovers—we agree in the main, like treble and bass. Ha, Petulant!

PETULANT Aye, in the main. But when I have a humor to contradict —

WITWOUD Aye, when he has a humor to contradict, then I contradict too. What, I know my cue. Then we contradict one another like two battledores,<sup>5</sup> for contradictions beget one another like Jews.

PETULANT If he says black's black—if I have a humor to say 'tis blue—let that pass.—All's one for that. If I have a humor to prove it, it must be granted.

WITWOUD Not positively must—but it may—it may.

PETULANT Yes, it positively must, upon proof positive.

WITWOUD Aye, upon proof positive it must; but upon proof presumptive it only may. That's a logical distinction now, madam.

MRS. MARWOOD I perceive your debates are of importance and very learnedly handled.

PETULANT Importance is one thing, and learning's another; but a debate's a debate, that I assert.

WITWOUD Petulant's an enemy to learning; he relies altogether on his parts.<sup>6</sup>

PETULANT No, I'm no enemy to learning; it hurts not me.

MRS. MARWOOD That's a sign indeed it's no enemy to you.

PETULANT No, no, it's no enemy to anybody but them that have it.

MILLAMANT Well, an illiterate man's my aversion. I wonder at the impudence of any illiterate man, to offer to make love.

WITWOUD That I confess I wonder at too.

MILLAMANT Ah! to marry an ignorant! that can hardly read or write.

PETULANT Why should a man be any further from being married though he can't read than he is from being hanged. The ordinary's<sup>7</sup> paid for setting the Psalm, and the parish priest for

reading the ceremony. And for the rest which is to follow in both cases, a man may do it without book.—So all's one for that.

MILLAMANT D'ye hear the creature? Lord, here's company, I'll be gone.

[*Exeunt* MILLAMANT *and* MINCING.]

WITWOUND In the name of Bartlemew and his Fair, what have we here?<sup>8</sup>

MRS. MARWOOD 'Tis your brother, I fancy. Don't you know him?

WITWOUND Not I.—Yes, I think it is he—I've almost forgot him; I have not seen him since the Revolution.<sup>9</sup>

[*Enter* SIR WILFULL WITWOUND *in riding clothes, and a* FOOTMAN *to* LADY WISHFORT.]

FOOTMAN Sir, my lady's dressing. Here's company; if you please to walk in, in the meantime.

SIR WILFULL Dressing! What, it's but morning here, I warrant, with you in London; we should count it towards afternoon in our parts, down in Shropshire. Why, then belike my aunt han't dined yet—ha, friend?

FOOTMAN Your aunt, Sir?

SIR WILFULL My aunt, sir, yes, my aunt, sir, and your lady, sir; your lady is my aunt, sir.—Why, what do'st thou not know me, friend? Why, then send somebody hither that does. How long hast thou lived with thy lady, fellow, ha?

FOOTMAN A week, sir; longer than anybody in the house, except my lady's woman.

SIR WILFULL Why, then belike thou dost not know thy lady, if thou see'st her, ha, friend?

FOOTMAN Why truly, sir, I cannot safely swear to her face in a morning, before she is dressed. 'Tis like I may give a shrewd guess at her by this time.

SIR WILFULL Well, prithee try what thou canst do; if thou canst not guess, inquire her out, do'st hear, fellow? And tell her her nephew, Sir Wilfull Witwoud, is in the house.

FOOTMAN I shall, sir.

SIR WILFULL    Hold ye, hear me, friend; a word with you in your ear.  
Prithee who are these gallants?

FOOTMAN    Really, sir, I can't tell; there come so many here, 'tis hard  
to know 'em all. [*Exit* FOOTMAN.]

SIR WILFULL    Oons,<sup>1</sup> this fellow knows less than a starling; I don't  
think a'knows his own name.

MRS. MARWOOD    Mr. Witwoud, your brother is not behind hand in  
forgetfulness—I fancy he has forgot you too.

WITWOUD    I hope so.—The devil take him that remembers first, I  
say.

SIR WILFULL    Save you, gentlemen and lady.

MRS. MARWOOD    For shame, Mr. Witwoud; why don't you speak to  
him?—And you, sir.

WITWOUD    Petulant, speak.

PETULANT    And you, sir.

SIR WILFULL    [*Salutes*<sup>2</sup> MARWOOD.] No offense, I hope.

MRS. MARWOOD    No sure, sir.

WITWOUD    This is a vile dog, I see that already. No offense! Ha, ha,  
ha, to him; to him, Petulant, smoke him.<sup>3</sup>

PETULANT    [*Surveying him round.*] It seems as if you had come a  
journey, sir. Hem, hem.

SIR WILFULL    Very likely, sir, that it may seem so.

PETULANT    No offense, I hope, sir.

WITWOUD    Smoke the boots, the boots, Petulant, the boots. Ha, ha,  
ha.

SIR WILFULL    Maybe not, sir; thereafter as 'tis meant, sir.

PETULANT    Sir, I presume upon the information of your boots.

SIR WILFULL    Why, 'tis like you may, sir: If you are not satisfied with  
the information of my boots, sir, if you will step to the stable, you  
may inquire further of my horse, sir.

PETULANT    Your horse, sir! Your horse is an ass, sir!

SIR WILFULL    Do you speak by way of offense, sir?

MRS. MARWOOD    The gentleman's merry, that's all, sir.—[*Aside.*] 'Slife,<sup>4</sup>  
we shall have a quarrel betwixt an horse and an ass, before they  
find one another out. [*Aloud.*] You must not take anything amiss

from your friends, sir. You are among your friends, here, though it may be you don't know it.—If I am not mistaken, you are Sir Wilfull Witwoud.

SIR WILFULL Right, lady; I am Sir Wilfull Witwoud, so I write myself; no offense to anybody, I hope; and nephew to the Lady Wishfort of this mansion.

MRS. MARWOOD Don't you know this gentleman, sir?

SIR WILFULL Hum! What, sure, 'tis not—yea by'r Lady, but 'tis—'sheart,<sup>5</sup> I know not whether 'tis or no.—Yea but 'tis, by the Wrekin.<sup>6</sup> Brother Antony! What, Tony, i'faith! What, do'st thou not know me? By'r Lady, nor I thee, thou art so becravated and so beperriwigged—'sheart, why do'st not speak? Art thou o'erjoyed?

WITWOUD Odso, brother, is it you? Your servant, brother.

SIR WILFULL Your servant! Why, yours, sir. Your servant again—'sheart, and your friend and servant to that—and a—[*Puff.*]<sup>7</sup>—and a flapdragon for your service, sir: and a hare's foot, and a hare's scut<sup>8</sup> for your service, sir; an you be so cold and so courtly!

WITWOUD No offense, I hope, brother.

SIR WILFULL 'Sheart, sir, but there is, and much offense. A pox, is this your Inns o'Court<sup>9</sup> breeding, not to know your friends and your relations, your elders and your betters?

WITWOUD Why, Brother Wilfull of Salop, you may be as short as a Shrewsbury cake,<sup>10</sup> if you please. But I tell you 'tis not modish to know relations in town. You think you're in the country, where great lubberly brothers slabber and kiss one another when they meet, like a call of sergeants.<sup>11</sup>—'Tis not the fashion here; 'tis not indeed, dear brother.

SIR WILFULL The fashion's a fool; and you're a fop, dear brother. 'Sheart, I've suspected this—by'r Lady, I conjectured you were a fop, since you began to change the style of your letters and write in a scrap of paper gilt round the edges, no bigger than a subpoena. I might expect this when you left off "Honored Brother" and "hoping you are in good health," and so forth—to begin with a "Rat me, knight, I'm so sick of a last night's debauch"—'od's heart, and then tell a familiar tale of a cock and bull, and a whore and a

bottle, and so conclude—You could write news before you were out of your time, when you lived with honest Pumple-Nose, the attorney of Furnival's Inn<sup>2</sup>—You could entreat to be remembered then to your friends round the Wrekin. We could have gazettes then, and Dawks's *Letter*, and the Weekly Bill,<sup>3</sup> till of late days.

PETULANT 'Slife, Witwoud, were you ever an attorney's clerk? Of the family of the Furnivals. Ha, ha, ha!

WITWOUND Aye, aye, but that was but for a while. Not long, not long; pshaw, I was not in my own power then. An orphan, and this fellow was my guardian; aye, aye, I was glad to consent to that man to come to London. He had the disposal of me then. If I had not agreed to that, I might have been bound 'prentice to a felt-maker in Shrewsbury; this fellow would have bound me to a maker of felts.

SIR WILFULL 'Sheart, and better than to be bound to a maker of fops; where, I suppose, you have served your time; and now you may set up for yourself.

MRS. MARWOOD You intend to travel, sir, as I'm informed.

SIR WILFULL Belike I may, madam. I may chance to sail upon the salt seas, if my mind hold.

PETULANT And the wind serve.

SIR WILFULL Serve or not serve, I shan't ask license of you, sir; nor the weather-cock<sup>4</sup> your companion. I direct my discourse to the lady, sir. 'Tis like my aunt may have told you, madam—Yes, I have settled my concerns, I may say now, and am minded to see foreign parts. If an' how that the peace<sup>5</sup> holds, whereby, that is, taxes abate.

MRS. MARWOOD I thought you had designed for France at all adventures.<sup>6</sup>

SIR WILFULL I can't tell that; 'tis like I may and 'tis like I may not. I am somewhat dainty in making a resolution, because when I make it I keep it, I don't stand shill I, shall I,<sup>7</sup> then; if I say't, I'll do't. But I have thoughts to tarry a small matter in town, to learn somewhat of your lingo first, before I cross the seas. I'd gladly

have a spice of your French as they say, whereby to hold discourse in foreign countries.

MRS. MARWOOD    Here's an academy in town for that use.

SIR WILFULL    There is? 'Tis like there may.

MRS. MARWOOD    No doubt you will return very much improved.

WITWOUND    Yes, refined like a Dutch skipper from a whale-fishing.

[*Enter* LADY WISHFORT *and* FAINALL.]

LADY WISHFORT    Nephew, you are welcome.

SIR WILFULL    Aunt, your servant.

FAINALL    Sir Wilfull, your most faithful servant.

SIR WILFULL    Cousin Fainall, give me your hand.

LADY WISHFORT    Cousin Witwoud, your servant; Mr. Petulant, your servant.—Nephew, you are welcome again. Will you drink anything after your journey, nephew, before you eat? Dinner's almost ready.

SIR WILFULL    I'm very well, I thank you, aunt. However, I thank you for your courteous offer. 'Sheart, I was afraid you would have been in the fashion too, and have remembered to have forgot your relations. Here's your cousin Tony, belike, I mayn't call him brother for fear of offense.

LADY WISHFORT    O, he's a rallier, nephew—my cousin's a wit; and your great wits always rally their best friends to choose.<sup>8</sup> When you have been abroad, nephew, you'll understand raillery better.

[FAINALL *and* MRS. MARWOOD *talk apart.*]

SIR WILFULL    Why then let him hold his tongue in the meantime, and rail when that day comes.

[*Enter* MINCING.]

MINCING    Mem, I come to acquaint your la'ship that dinner is impatient.

SIR WILFULL    Impatient? Why then belike it won't stay till I pull off my boots. Sweetheart, can you help me to a pair of slippers?—My man's with his horses, I warrant.

LADY WISHFORT    Fie, fie, nephew, you would not pull off your boots here. Go down into the hall.—Dinner shall stay for you. My nephew's a little unbred; you'll pardon him, madam.—Gentlemen, will you walk? Marwood?

MRS. MARWOOD I'll follow you, madam—before Sir Wilfull is ready.

[*Exeunt all but* MRS. MARWOOD, FAINALL.]

FAINALL Why then Foible's a bawd, an errant, rank, match-making bawd. And I it seems am a husband, a rank husband; and my wife a very errant, rank wife—all in the way of the world. 'Sdeath, to be a cuckold by anticipation, a cuckold in embryo? Sure I was born with budding antlers like a young satyr, or a citizen's child.<sup>9</sup> 'Sdeath, to be outwitted, to be outjilted—outmatrimonied. If I had kept my speed like a stag, 'twere somewhat, but to crawl after, with my horns like a snail, and be outstripped by my wife—'tis scurvy wedlock.

MRS. MARWOOD Then shake it off. You have often wished for an opportunity to part, and now you have it. But first prevent their plot.—The half of Millamant's fortune is too considerable to be parted with to a foe, to Mirabell.

FAINALL Damn him, that had been mine—had you not made that fond<sup>1</sup> discovery.—That had been forfeited, had they been married. My wife had added luster to my horns. By that increase of fortune, I could have worn 'em tipped with gold, though my forehead had been furnished like a Deputy-Lieutenant's hall.<sup>2</sup>

MRS. MARWOOD They may prove a cap of maintenance<sup>3</sup> to you still, if you can away with your wife. And she's no worse than when you had her—I dare swear she had given up her game, before she was married.

FAINALL Hum! That may be—She might throw up her cards; but I'll be hanged if she did not put Pam<sup>4</sup> in her pocket.

MRS. MARWOOD You married her to keep you, and if you can contrive to have her keep you better than you expected, why should you not keep her longer than you intended?

FAINALL The means, the means.

MRS. MARWOOD Discover to my lady your wife's conduct; threaten to part with her.—My lady loves her and will come to any composition to save her reputation. Take the opportunity of breaking it, just upon the discovery of this imposture. My lady will be enraged beyond bounds and sacrifice niece and fortune and all at that



conjuncture. And let me alone to keep her warm; if she should flag in her part, I will not fail to prompt her.

FAINALL Faith, this has an appearance.<sup>5</sup>

MRS. MARWOOD I'm sorry I hinted to my lady to endeavor a match between Millamant and Sir Wilfull. That may be an obstacle.

FAINALL O, for that matter leave me to manage him; I'll disable him for that; he will drink like a Dane; after dinner, I'll set his hand in.

MRS. MARWOOD Well, how do you stand affected towards your lady?

FAINALL Why, faith, I'm thinking of it. Let me see—I am married already; so that's over. My wife has played the jade with<sup>6</sup> me—well, that's over too. I never loved her, or if I had, why that would have been over too by this time. Jealous of her I cannot be, for I am certain; so there's an end of jealousy. Weary of her I am and shall be—no, there's no end of that; no, no, that were too much to hope. Thus far concerning my repose. Now for my reputation. As to my own, I married not for it; so that's out of the question. And as to my part in my wife's—why, she had parted with hers before; so bringing none to me, she can take none from me; 'tis against all rule of play that I should lose to one who has not wherewithal to stake.

MRS. MARWOOD Besides you forget, marriage is honorable.

FAINALL Hum! Faith, and that's well thought on; marriage is honorable, as you say; and if so, wherefore should cuckoldom be a discredit, being derived from so honorable a root?

MRS. MARWOOD Nay, I know not; if the root be honorable, why not the branches?<sup>7</sup>

FAINALL So, so, why this point's clear.<sup>8</sup> Well, how do we proceed?

MRS. MARWOOD I will contrive a letter which shall be delivered to my lady at the time when that rascal who is to act Sir Rowland is with her. It shall come as from an unknown hand—for the less I appear to know of the truth, the better I can play the incendiary. Besides, I would not have Foible provoked if I could help it, because you know she knows some passages—nay, I expect all will come out. But let the mine be sprung first, and then I care not if I am discovered.



FAINALL If the worst come to the worst, I'll turn my wife to grass<sup>9</sup>—  
I have already a deed of settlement of the best part of her estate,  
which I wheedled out of her; and that you shall partake at least.

MRS. MARWOOD I hope you are convinced that I hate Mirabell now:  
you'll be no more jealous?

FAINALL Jealous, no—by this kiss.—Let husbands be jealous, but let  
the lover still believe. Or if he doubt, let it be only to endear his  
pleasure and prepare the joy that follows, when he proves his  
mistress true. But let husbands' doubts convert to endless  
jealousy; or if they have belief, let it corrupt to superstition and  
blind credulity. I am single, and will herd no more with 'em. True, I  
wear the badge, but I'll disown the order. And since I take my  
leave of 'em, I care not if I leave 'em a common motto to their  
common crest.

All husbands must, or pain, or shame, endure;  
The wise too jealous are, fools too secure.

[*Exeunt* FAINALL and MRS. MARWOOD.]

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Dull, stupid person.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Rouge.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Bartender.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The servant at the inn where Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are taken care of.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In her negligee (French).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Private room.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: By Collier (see p. 222, n. 7). Francis Quarles (1592–1644), a religious poet, by 1700 regarded with contempt, but formerly greatly admired, especially among the Puritans. William Prynne (1600–1669), Puritan pamphleteer, author of *Histriomastix* (1632), a violent attack on the stage. Congreve, who had been the object of much of Collier's vituperation, slyly

identifies his enemy with Puritans and Nonconformists, whom Collier, an ardent High Churchman, despised.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Considered a good likeness.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Jeers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: When a regiment was “disbanded,” its officers went on half pay, often for life. “Catering”: procuring (that is, pimping for Lady Wishfort).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: One who draws wine from casks and serves it.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A fashionable tavern near Charing Cross.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Old, cast-off clothes; an insulting metaphor to apply to Lady Wishfort.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A shed, supported by the wall toward which it is inclined. “Tatterdemalion”: ragamuffin. Long Lane was a street where old clothes were sold.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Prisoners begged by letting down a mitten on a string; passers-by dropped coins into it. Ludgate was a debtor’s prison, adjoining the district of Blackfriars in London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, will *he* not fail?[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Lacks the looks for it.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The subsequent conversation is sometimes staged to show Mrs. Marwood overhearing it.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, impersonate.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An inclination (toward Mirabell).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A person who serves as an instrument or tool of others in an intrigue.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Mrs. Fainall.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An alchemical term denoting the final step in the transmutation of baser metals into gold.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hodgepodge.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Fought. Millamant turns Mincing’s word to refer to clothing in her next remark.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A woolen cloth.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Coarse woolen cloth, made in the Berry district of France.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Fine gentlemen and ladies sometimes donated their old clothes to the playhouses.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Spreads out.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Lady Strammel (the name means “a lean, ill-favored person”) tries to lose weight by drinking Rhenish wine, but still her face is too large to be contained (“comprehended”) in a mask.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A lady to whom toasts are no longer drunk.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A prophetess.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, to comb their periwigs.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The name of the singer was to be inserted. The music was by John Eccles (d. 1735), a popular composer for the theater.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Rackets used to strike the shuttlecock, or bird, in the old game from which badminton is descended.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Native abilities.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The clergyman appointed to prepare condemned prisoners for death.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A feature of St. Bartholomew’s Fair, held during August in Smithfield, London, was the exhibition of monsters and freaks of nature.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Glorious Revolution of 1688, which forced the abdication of James II.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An uncouth oath: God’s wounds.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Kisses.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Make fun of him.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: God’s life.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: God’s heart.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A solitary mountain peak in Shropshire, near the Welsh border.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Rabbit’s tail. “Flapdragon”: something worthless.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The buildings—Gray’s Inn, Lincoln’s Inn, the Inner Temple, the Middle Temple—housing the four legal societies that have the sole right to admit persons to the practice of law.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Shortcake, in the modern meaning of the term. Witwoud puns, using “short” also in the sense of “abrupt.” “Salop”: ancient name of Shropshire.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Witwoud refers to the mutual greetings and felicitations of a group of barristers (“sergeants”) newly admitted to the bar. “Lubberly”: loutish.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: One of the inns of Chancery, attached to Lincoln’s Inn. Attorneys were looked down on socially; hence Petulant’s ill-natured mirth in his next speech. “Before you were out of your time”: before you had served out your apprenticeship.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The official list of the deaths occurring in London. “Gazettes”: newspapers. “Dawks’s *Letter*”: a popular source of news in the country.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Weathervane.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The peace established by the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, which concluded the war against France waged under the leadership of William III by England, the Empire, Spain, and Holland. It endured until the spring of 1702, when the War of the Spanish Succession began.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: No matter what happens.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Shilly-shally. “Dainty”: scrupulous, cautious.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: By choice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A cuckold is said to wear horns. Because the wives of “citizens” (merchants living in the old city of London, not the fashionable suburbs) were regarded by the rakes as their natural and easy prey, a “citizen’s child” was born to be cuckolded. “Satyr”: a sylvan deity, usually represented with a goat’s legs and horns.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Foolish. Fainall blames her for revealing to Lady Wishfort that Mirabell was not interested in her.[Return to](#)

[reference 1](#)

- Note 2: That is, the great hall in the house of the deputy lieutenant of a shire. Fainall imagines it ornamented with numerous antlers taken from deer slain in the hunt.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In heraldry, a cap with two points like horns.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Jack of clubs, high card in the game of loo.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: It's a promising scheme.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Cheated on.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, of the cuckold's horns.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cleared up.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Turn out to pasture. A "grass widow" is divorced or separated from her husband.[Return to reference 9](#)

## ***Act 4—Scene continues***

**[*Enter* LADY WISHFORT *and* FOIBLE.]**

LADY WISHFORT Is Sir Rowland coming, say'st thou, Foible? and are things in order?

FOIBLE Yes, madam. I have put wax lights in the sconces, and placed the footmen in a row in the hall, in their best liveries, with the coachman and postilion to fill up the equipage.

LADY WISHFORT Have you pulvilled<sup>1</sup> the coachman and postilion, that they may not stink of the stable, when Sir Rowland comes by?

FOIBLE Yes, madam.

LADY WISHFORT And are the dancers and the music ready, that he may be entertained in all points with correspondence to his passion?

FOIBLE All is ready, madam.

LADY WISHFORT And—well—and how do I look, Foible?

FOIBLE Most killing well, madam.

LADY WISHFORT Well, and how shall I receive him? In what figure shall I give his heart the first impression? There is a great deal in the first impression. Shall I sit?—No, I won't sit—I'll walk.—Aye, I'll walk from the door upon his entrance; and then turn full upon him.—No, that will be too sudden. I'll lie—aye, I'll lie down—I'll receive him in my little dressing-room, there's a couch.—Yes, yes, I'll give the first impression on a couch.—I won't lie neither, but loll and lean upon one elbow; with one foot a little dangling off, jogging in a thoughtful way—yes—and then as soon as he appears, start, aye, start and be surprised, and rise to meet him in a pretty disorder—yes. O, nothing is more alluring than a levee<sup>2</sup> from a couch in some confusion. It shows the foot to advantage and furnishes with blushes and recomposing airs beyond comparison. Hark! There's a coach.

FOIBLE 'Tis he, madam.

LADY WISHFORT O dear, has my nephew made his addresses to Millamant? I ordered him.

FOIBLE Sir Wilfull is set in to drinking, madam, in the parlor.

LADY WISHFORT 'Ods my life, I'll send him to her. Call her down, Foible; bring her hither. I'll send him as I go.—When they are together, then come to me, Foible, that I may not be too long alone with Sir Rowland. [*Exit* LADY WISHFORT.]

[*Enter* MRS. MILLAMANT *and* MRS. FAINALL.]

FOIBLE Madam, I stayed here to tell your ladyship that Mr. Mirabell has waited this half hour for an opportunity to talk with you. Though my lady's orders were to leave you and Sir Wilfull together. Shall I tell Mr. Mirabell that you are at leisure?

MILLAMANT No—What would the dear man have? I am thoughtful and would amuse myself.—Bid him come another time.

There never yet was woman made,  
Nor shall, but to be cursed.<sup>3</sup>

[*Repeating and walking about.*]

That's hard!

MRS. FAINALL You are very fond of Sir John Suckling today, Millamant, and the poets.

MILLAMANT He? Aye, and filthy verses—so I am.

FOIBLE Sir Wilfull is coming, madam. Shall I send Mr. Mirabell away?

MILLAMANT Aye, if you please, Foible, send him away—or send him hither, just as you will, dear Foible. I think I'll see him—Shall I? Aye, let the wretch come.

Thyrsis, a youth of the inspirèd train.<sup>4</sup>

[*Repeating.*]

Dear Fainall, entertain Sir Wilfull.—Thou hast philosophy to undergo a fool, thou art married and hast patience.—I would confer with my own thoughts.

MRS. FAINALL I am obliged to you that you would make me your proxy in this affair, but I have business of my own.

[*Enter* SIR WILFULL.]

MRS. FAINALL O Sir Wilfull; you are come at the critical instant.  
There's your mistress up to the ears in love and contemplation.  
Pursue your point, now or never.

SIR WILFULL Yes; my aunt will have it so.—I would gladly have been encouraged with a bottle or two, because I'm somewhat wary at first, before I am acquainted; [*This while* MILLAMANT *walks about repeating to herself.*]*—*but I hope, after a time, I shall break my mind<sup>5</sup>—that is upon further acquaintance.—So for the present, cousin, I'll take my leave.—If so be you'll be so kind to make my excuse, I'll return to my company.—

MRS. FAINALL O fie, Sir Wilfull! What, you must not be daunted.

SIR WILFULL Daunted, no, that's not it; it is not so much for that—for if so be that I set on't, I'll do't. But only for the present, 'tis sufficient till further acquaintance, that's all.—Your servant.

MRS. FAINALL Nay, I'll swear you shall never lose so favorable an opportunity if I can help it. I'll leave you together and lock the door. [*Exit* MRS. FAINALL.]

SIR WILFULL Nay, nay, cousin—I have forgot my gloves.—What d'ye do? 'Sheart, a'has locked the door indeed, I think.—Nay, cousin Fainall, open the door.—Pshaw, what a vixen trick is this? Nay, now a'has seen me too.—Cousin, I made bold to pass through, as it were.—I think this door's enchanted.—

MILLAMANT [*Repeating.*]

I prithee spare me, gentle boy,  
Press me no more for that slight toy.<sup>6</sup>

SIR WILFULL Anan?<sup>7</sup> Cousin, your servant.

MILLAMANT. —"That foolish trifle of a heart"—Sir Wilfull!

SIR WILFULL Yes—your servant. No offense I hope, cousin.

MILLAMANT [*Repeating.*]

I swear it will not do its part,  
Though thou dost thine, employ'st thy power and  
art.



Natural, easy Suckling!

SIR WILFULL    Anan? Suckling? No such suckling neither, cousin, nor stripling: I thank heaven I'm no minor.

MILLAMANT    Ah rustic, ruder than Gothic.<sup>8</sup>

SIR WILFULL    Well, well, I shall understand your lingo one of these days, cousin. In the meanwhile I must answer in plain English.

MILLAMANT    Have you any business with me, Sir Wilfull?

SIR WILFULL    Not at present, cousin.—Yes, I made bold to see, to come and know if that how you were disposed to fetch a walk this evening, if so be that I might not be troublesome, I would have sought a walk with you.

MILLAMANT    A walk? What then?

SIR WILFULL    Nay nothing—only for the walk's sake, that's all—

MILLAMANT    I nauseate walking; 'tis a country diversion. I loathe the country and everything that relates to it.

SIR WILFULL    Indeed! Hah! Look ye, look ye, you do? Nay, 'tis like you may.—Here are choice of pastimes here in town, as plays and the like; that must be confessed indeed.—

MILLAMANT    Ah, *l'étourdi*.<sup>9</sup> I hate the town too.

SIR WILFULL    Dear heart, that's much—Hah! that you should hate 'em both! Hah! 'tis like you may; there are some can't relish the town, and others can't away with the country—'tis like you may be one of those, cousin.

MILLAMANT    Ha, ha, ha. Yes, 'tis like I may. You have nothing further to say to me?

SIR WILFULL    Not at present, cousin. 'Tis like when I have an opportunity to be more private, I may break my mind in some measure.—I conjecture you partly guess—however, that's as time shall try; but spare to speak and spare to speed, as they say.

MILLAMANT    If it is of no great importance, Sir Wilfull, you will oblige me to leave me. I have just now a little business.

SIR WILFULL    Enough, enough, cousin. Yes, yes, all a case—when you're disposed, when you're disposed. Now's as well as another time; and another time as well as now. All's one for that.—Yes,

yes, if your concerns call you, there's no haste; it will keep cold as they say.—Cousin, your servant. I think this door's locked.

MILLAMANT     You may go this way, sir.

SIR WILFULL     Your servant—then with your leave I'll return to my company.

[*Exit* SIR WILFULL.]

MILLAMANT     Aye, aye. Ha, ha, ha.

Like Phoebus sung the no less amorous Boy.<sup>1</sup>

[*Enter* MIRABELL.]

MIRABELL

Like Daphne she, as lovely and as coy.

Do you lock yourself up from me, to make my search more curious?<sup>2</sup>  
Or is this pretty artifice contrived to signify that here the chase must end, and my pursuit be crowned, for you can fly no further?

MILLAMANT     Vanity! No—I'll fly and be followed to the last moment.

Though I am upon the very verge of matrimony, I expect you should solicit me as much as if I were wavering at the grate of a monastery,<sup>3</sup> with one foot over the threshold. I'll be solicited to the very last, nay and afterwards.

MIRABELL     What, after the last?

MILLAMANT     O, I should think I was poor and had nothing to bestow, if I were reduced to an inglorious ease; and freed from the agreeable fatigues of solicitation.

MIRABELL     But do not you know that when favors are conferred upon instant and tedious solicitation, that they diminish in their value and that both the giver loses the grace, and the receiver lessens his pleasure?

MILLAMANT     It may be in things of common application, but never sure in love. O, I hate a lover that can dare to think he draws a moment's air, independent on the bounty of his mistress. There is

not so impudent a thing in nature as the saucy look of an assured man, confident of success. The pedantic arrogance of a very husband has not so pragmatical<sup>4</sup> an air. Ah! I'll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure.

MIRABELL Would you have 'em both before marriage? Or will you be contented with the first now, and stay for the other till after grace?

MILLAMANT Ah, don't be impertinent.—My dear liberty, shall I leave thee? My faithful solitude, my darling contemplation, must I bid you then adieu? Ay-h adieu—My morning thoughts, agreeable wakings, indolent slumbers, all ye *douceurs*, ye *sommeils du matin*,<sup>5</sup> adieu.—I can't do't, 'tis more than impossible.—Positively, Mirabell, I'll lie abed in a morning as long as I please.

MIRABELL Then I'll get up in a morning as early as I please.

MILLAMANT Ah, idle creature, get up when you will.—and d'ye hear? I won't be called names after I'm married; positively I won't be called names.

MIRABELL Names!

MILLAMANT Aye, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweetheart, and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar—I shall never bear that.—Good Mirabell, don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my Lady Fadler<sup>6</sup> and Sir Francis; nor go to Hyde Park together the first Sunday in a new chariot, to provoke eyes and whispers; and then never be seen there together again, as if we were proud of one another the first week, and ashamed of one another ever after. Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together, but let us be very strange<sup>7</sup> and well bred; let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while; and as well bred as if we were not married at all.

MIRABELL Have you any more conditions to offer? Hitherto your demands are pretty reasonable.

MILLAMANT Trifles—as liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whom I please; to write and receive letters, without interrogatories or wry faces on your part; to wear what I please;

and choose conversation with regard only to my own taste; to have no obligation upon me to converse with wits that I don't like, because they are your acquaintance; or to be intimate with fools, because they may be your relations. Come to dinner when I please, dine in my dressing room when I'm out of humor, without giving a reason. To have my closet inviolate; to be sole empress of my tea table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. And lastly, wherever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in. These articles subscribed, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife.

MIRABELL Your bill of fare is something advanced in this latter account. Well, have I liberty to offer conditions—that when you are dwindled into a wife, I may not be beyond measure enlarged into a husband?

MILLAMANT You have free leave, propose your utmost, speak and spare not.

MIRABELL I thank you. *Imprimis*<sup>8</sup> then, I covenant that your acquaintance be general; that you admit no sworn confidante or intimate of your own sex; no she-friend to screen her affairs under your countenance and tempt you to make trial of a mutual secrecy. No decoy duck to wheedle you a fop—scrambling to the play in a mask—then bring you home in a pretended fright, when you think you shall be found out—and rail at me for missing the play, and disappointing the frolic which you had to pick me up and prove my constancy.

MILLAMANT Detestable *imprimis*! I go to the play in a mask!

MIRABELL *Item*, I article,<sup>9</sup> that you continue to like your own face as long as I shall; and while it passes current with me, that you endeavor not to new coin it. To which end, together with all vizards for the day, I prohibit all masks for the night, made of oiled-skins and I know not what—hog's bones, hare's gall, pig water, and the marrow of a roasted cat.<sup>1</sup> In short, I forbid all commerce with the gentlewoman in what-d'ye-call-it court. *Item*, I shut my doors against all bawds with baskets, and pennyworths of

muslin, china, fans, atlases,<sup>2</sup> etc. *Item*, when you shall be breeding—

MILLAMANT Ah! Name it not.

MIRABELL Which may be presumed, with a blessing on our endeavors—

MILLAMANT Odious endeavors!

MIRABELL I denounce against all strait lacing, squeezing for a shape, till you mold my boy's head like a sugar loaf; and instead of a man-child, make me father to a crooked billet.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, to the dominion of the tea table I submit.—But with proviso that you exceed not in your province; but restrain yourself to native and simple tea-table drinks, as tea, chocolate, and coffee. As likewise to genuine and authorized tea-table talk—such as mending of fashions, spoiling reputations, railing at absent friends, and so forth—but that on no account you encroach upon the men's prerogative, and presume to drink healths, or toast fellows; for prevention of which, I banish all foreign forces, all auxiliaries to the tea table, as orange brandy, all aniseed, cinnamon, citron and Barbados waters, together with ratafia and the most noble spirit of clary.<sup>4</sup>—But for cowslip-wine, poppy water, and all dormitives,<sup>5</sup> those I allow. These provisos admitted, in other things I may prove a tractable and complying husband.

MILLAMANT O, horrid provisos! filthy strong waters! I toast fellows, odious men! I hate your odious provisos.

MIRABELL Then we're agreed. Shall I kiss your hand upon the contract? And here comes one to be a witness to the sealing of the deed.

[*Enter* MRS. FAINALL.]

MILLAMANT Fainall, what shall I do? Shall I have him? I think I must have him.

MRS. FAINALL Aye, aye, take him, take him. What should you do?

MILLAMANT Well then—I'll take my death I'm in a horrid fright—Fainall, I shall never say it—well—I think—I'll endure you.

MRS. FAINALL Fy, fy, have him, have him, and tell him so in plain terms: for I am sure you have a mind to him.

MILLAMANT Are you? I think I have—and the horrid man looks as if he thought so too.—Well, you ridiculous thing you, I'll have you.—I won't be kissed, nor I won't be thanked.—Here kiss my hand though.—So, hold your tongue now, don't say a word.

MRS. FAINALL Mirabell, there's a necessity for your obedience—you have neither time to talk nor stay. My mother is coming; and in my conscience if she should see you, would fall into fits, and maybe not recover, time enough to return to Sir Rowland; who, as Foible tells me, is in a fair way to succeed. Therefore spare your ecstasies for another occasion, and slip down the back stairs, where Foible waits to consult you.

MILLAMANT Aye, go, go. In the meantime I suppose you have said something to please me.

MIRABELL I am all obedience.

[*Exit* MIRABELL.]

MRS. FAINALL Yonder Sir Wilfull's drunk, and so noisy that my mother has been forced to leave Sir Rowland to appease him; but he answers her only with singing and drinking.—What they may have done by this time I know not, but Petulant and he were upon quarreling as I came by.

MILLAMANT Well, if Mirabell should not make a good husband, I am a lost thing; for I find I love him violently.

MRS. FAINALL So it seems, for you mind not what's said to you.—If you doubt him, you had best take up with Sir Wilfull.

MILLAMANT How can you name that superannuated lubber? foh!

[*Enter* WITWOUD *from drinking*.]

MRS. FAINALL So, is the fray made up, that you have left 'em?

WITWOUD Left 'em? I could stay no longer—I have laughed like ten christenings—I am tipsy with laughing.—If I had stayed any longer, I should have burst—I must have been let out and pieced in the sides like an unsized camlet.<sup>6</sup>—Yes, yes, the fray is composed; my lady came in like a *nolle prosequi*<sup>7</sup> and stopped the proceedings.

MILLAMANT What was the dispute?

WITWOUD That's the jest; there was no dispute. They could neither of 'em speak for rage; and so fell a-sputtering at one another like two roasting apples.

[*Enter PETULANT drunk.*]

WITWOUD Now, Petulant? All's over, all's well? Gad, my head begins to whim it about.—Why dost thou not speak? Thou art both as drunk and as mute as a fish.

PETULANT Look you, Mrs. Millamant—if you can love me, dear nymph—say it—and that's the conclusion—pass on, or pass off—that's all.

WITWOUD Thou hast uttered volumes, folios, in less than decimo sexto, my dear Lacedemonian.<sup>8</sup> Sirrah Petulant, thou art an epitomizer of words.

PETULANT Witwoud—You are an annihilator of sense.

WITWOUD Thou art a retailer of phrases, and dost deal in remnants of remnants, like a maker of pincushions. Thou art in truth (metaphorically speaking) a speaker of shorthand.

PETULANT Thou art (without a figure) just one-half of an ass, and Baldwin<sup>9</sup> yonder, thy half brother, is the rest.—A Gemini<sup>1</sup> of asses split, would make just four of you.

WITWOUD Thou dost bite, my dear mustard-seed; kiss me for that.

PETULANT Stand off—I'll kiss no more males.—I have kissed your twin yonder in a humor of reconciliation, till he—[*Hiccup.*—]—rises upon my stomach like a radish.

MILLAMANT Eh! filthy creature.—What was the quarrel?

PETULANT There was no quarrel—there might have been a quarrel.

WITWOUD If there had been words enow between 'em to have expressed provocation, they had gone together by the ears like a pair of castanets.

PETULANT You were the quarrel.

MILLAMANT Me!

PETULANT If I have a humor to quarrel, I can make less matters conclude premises.<sup>2</sup>—If you are not handsome, what then, if I have a humor to prove it?—If I shall have my reward, say so; if not, fight for your face the next time yourself.—I'll go sleep.



WITWOUD Do, wrap thyself up like a woodlouse, and dream revenge  
—and hear me, if thou canst learn to write by tomorrow morning,  
pen me a challenge.—I'll carry it for thee.

PETULANT Carry your mistress's monkey a spider—go flea dogs, and  
read romances—I'll go to bed to my maid.<sup>3</sup>

MRS. FAINALL He's horridly drunk—how came you all in this pickle?

WITWOUD A plot, a plot, to get rid of the knight—your husband's  
advice; but he sneaked off.

[*Enter* SIR WILFULL *drunk, and* LADY WISHFORT.]

LADY WISHFORT Out upon't, out upon't! At years of discretion, and  
comport yourself at this rantipole<sup>4</sup> rate!

SIR WILFULL No offense, aunt.

LADY WISHFORT Offense? As I'm a person, I'm ashamed of you.—  
Fogh! how you stink of wine! D'ye think my niece will ever endure  
such a borachio!<sup>5</sup> you're an absolute borachio.

SIR WILFULL Borachio!

LADY WISHFORT At a time when you should commence an amour, and  
put your best foot foremost—

SIR WILFULL 'Sheart, an you grutch<sup>6</sup> me your liquor, make a bill.—  
Give me more drink, and take my purse.

[*Sings.*] Prithee fill me the glass  
'Till it laugh in my face,  
With ale that is potent and mellow;  
He that whines for a lass  
Is an ignorant ass,  
For a bumper<sup>7</sup> has not its fellow.

But if you would have me marry my cousin—say the word and I'll  
do't—Wilfull will do't, that's the word—Wilfull will do't, that's my crest  
—my motto I have forgot.<sup>8</sup>

LADY WISHFORT My nephew's a little overtaken, cousin—but 'tis with  
drinking your health—O' my word you are obliged to him—

SIR WILFULL *In vino veritas*,<sup>9</sup> aunt.—If I drunk your health today,  
cousin—I am a borachio. But if you have a mind to be married,



say the word, and send for the piper; Wilfull will do't. If not, dust<sup>1</sup> it away, and let's have t'other round.—Tony, 'ods heart, where's Tony?—Tony's an honest fellow, but he spits after a bumper, and that's a fault—

[*Sings.*]      We'll drink and we'll never ha' done, boys,  
                 'Put the glass then around with the sun, boys,  
         Let Apollo's example invite us;  
         'For he's drunk every night,  
         'And that makes him so bright,  
         That he's able next morning to light us.

The sun's a good pimple,<sup>2</sup> an honest soaker, he has a cellar at your Antipodes. If I travel, aunt, I touch at your Antipodes.—Your Antipodes are a good rascally sort of topsy-turvy fellows.—If I had a bumper, I'd stand upon my head and drink a health to 'em.—A match or no match, cousin, with the hard name?—aunt, Wilfull will do't. If she has her maidenhead, let her look to't; if she has not, let her keep her own counsel in the meantime, and cry out at the nine months' end.

MILLAMANT    Your pardon, madam, I can stay no longer—Sir Wilfull grows very powerful. Egh! how he smells! I shall be overcome if I stay. Come, cousin.

[*Exeunt* MRS. MILLAMANT *and* MRS. FAINALL.]

LADY WISHFORT    Smells! he would poison a tallow-chandler<sup>3</sup> and his family. Beastly creature, I know not what to do with him. Travel, quoth a'; aye, travel, travel, get thee gone, get thee but far enough, to the Saracens, or the Tartars, or the Turks—for thou art not fit to live in a Christian commonwealth, thou beastly pagan.

SIR WILFULL    Turks, no; no Turks, aunt. Your Turks are infidels, and believe not in the grape.<sup>4</sup> Your Mahometan, your Mussulman is a dry stinkard.—No offense, aunt. My map says that your Turk is not so honest a man as your Christian.—I cannot find by the map that your Mufti<sup>5</sup> is orthodox—whereby it is a plain case, that orthodox is a hard word, aunt, and—[*Hiccup.*]—Greek for claret.



[*Enter WAITWELL, disguised as SIR ROWLAND.*]

LADY WISHFORT Dear Sir Rowland, I am confounded with confusion at the retrospection of my own rudeness—I have more pardons to ask than the Pope distributes in the Year of Jubilee. But I hope where there is likely to be so near an alliance—we may unbend the severity of decorum—and dispense with a little ceremony.

WAITWELL My impatience, madam, is the effect of my transport—and till I have the possession of your adorable person, I am tantalized on the rack; and do but hang, madam, on the tenter<sup>3</sup> of expectation.

LADY WISHFORT You have excess of gallantry, Sir Rowland; and press things to a conclusion, with a most prevailing vehemence.—But a day or two for decency of marriage.—

WAITWELL For decency of funeral, madam. The delay will break my heart—or if that should fail, I shall be poisoned. My nephew will get an inkling of my designs, and poison me—and I would willingly starve him before I die—I would gladly go out of the world with that satisfaction.—That would be some comfort to me, if I could but live so long as to be revenged on that unnatural viper.

LADY WISHFORT Is he so unnatural, say you? Truly I would contribute much both to the saving of your life and the accomplishment of your revenge—Not that I respect<sup>4</sup> myself; though he has been a perfidious wretch to me.

WAITWELL Perfidious to you!

LADY WISHFORT O Sir Rowland, the hours that he has died away at my feet, the tears that he has shed, the oaths that he has sworn, the palpitations that he has felt, the trances and the tremblings, the ardors and the ecstasies, the kneelings, and the risings, the heart-heavings and the hand-gripings, the pangs and the pathetic regards of his protesting eyes! Oh, no memory can register.

WAITWELL What, my rival! Is the rebel my rival? a'dies.

LADY WISHFORT No, don't kill him at once, Sir Rowland, starve him gradually inch by inch.

WAITWELL I'll do't. In three weeks he shall be barefoot; in a month out at knees with begging an alms—he shall starve upward and

upward, till he has nothing living but his head, and then go out in a stink like a candle's end upon a saveall.<sup>5</sup>

LADY WISHFORT Well, Sir Rowland, you have the way.—You are no novice in the labyrinth of love—you have the clue—but as I am a person, Sir Rowland, you must not attribute my yielding to any sinister appetite, or indigestion of widowhood; nor impute my complacency to any lethargy of continence.—I hope you do not think me prone to any iteration of nuptials.—

WAITWELL Far be it from me—

LADY WISHFORT If you do, I protest I must recede—or think that I have made a prostitution of decorums, but in the vehemence of compassion, and to save the life of a person of so much importance—

WAITWELL I esteem it so—

LADY WISHFORT Or else you wrong my condescension—

WAITWELL I do no, I do not—

LADY WISHFORT Indeed you do.

WAITWELL I do not, fair shrine of virtue.

LADY WISHFORT If you think the least scruple of carnality was an ingredient—

WAITWELL Dear madam, no. You are all camphire<sup>6</sup> and frankincense, all chastity and odor.

LADY WISHFORT Or that—

[*Enter* FOIBLE.]

FOIBLE Madam, the dancers are ready, and there's one with a letter, who must deliver it into your own hands.

LADY WISHFORT Sir Rowland, will you give me leave? Think favorably, judge candidly, and conclude you have found a person who would suffer racks in honor's cause, dear Sir Rowland, and will wait on you incessantly.<sup>7</sup>

[*Exit* LADY WISHFORT.]

WAITWELL Fie, fie!—What a slavery have I undergone; spouse, hast thou any cordial? I want spirits.

FOIBLE What a washy rogue art thou, to pant thus for a quarter of an hour's lying and swearing to a fine lady?

WAITWELL O, she is the antidote to desire. Spouse, thou wilt fare the worse for't—I shall have no appetite for iteration of nuptials—this eight and forty hours—by this hand I'd rather be a chairman in the dog days<sup>8</sup>—than act Sir Rowland till this time tomorrow.

[*Re-enter* LADY WISHFORT, *with a letter.*]

LADY WISHFORT Call in the dancers.—Sir Rowland, we'll sit, if you please, and see the entertainment.

[*Dance.*]

Now with your permission, Sir Rowland, I will peruse my letter.—I would open it in your presence, because I would not make you uneasy. If it should make you uneasy, I would burn it—speak if it does—but you may see, the superscription is like a woman's hand.

FOIBLE [*To him.*] By heaven! Mrs. Marwood's, I know it—my heart aches—get it from her.—

WAITWELL A woman's hand? No, madam, that's no woman's hand, I see that already. That's somebody whose throat must be cut.

LADY WISHFORT Nay, Sir Rowland, since you give me a proof of your passion by your jealousy, I promise you I'll make a return, by a frank communication—you shall see it—we'll open it together—look you here.—[*Reads.*]*—Madam, though unknown to you (Look you there, 'tis from nobody that I know.)—I have that honor for your character, that I think myself obliged to let you know you are abused. He who pretends to be Sir Rowland is a cheat and a rascal—*O Heavens! what's this?

FOIBLE Unfortunate, all's ruined.

WAITWELL How, how, let me see, let me see—[*Reads.*]*—A rascal and disguised, and suborned for that imposture—*O villainy! O villainy!*—by the contrivance of—*

LADY WISHFORT I shall faint, I shall die, oh!

FOIBLE [*To him.*] Say, 'tis your nephew's hand.—Quickly, his plot, swear, swear it.—

WAITWELL Here's a villain! Madam, don't you perceive it, don't you see it?

LADY WISHFORT Too well, too well. I have seen too much.

WAITWELL I told you at first I knew the hand—A woman's hand?  
The rascal writes a sort of a large hand, your Roman hand—I saw  
there was a throat to be cut presently. If he were my son, as he is  
my nephew, I'd pistol him—

FOIBLE O treachery! But are you sure, Sir Rowland, it is his writing?

WAITWELL Sure? Am I here? Do I live? Do I love this pearl of India?  
I have twenty letters in my pocket from him in the same character.

LADY WISHFORT How!

FOIBLE O, what luck it is, Sir Rowland, that you were present at this  
juncture! This was the business that brought Mr. Mirabell disguised  
to Madam Millamant this afternoon. I thought something was  
contriving, when he stole by me and would have hid his face.

LADY WISHFORT How, how!—I heard the villain was in the house  
indeed; and now I remember, my niece went away abruptly, when  
Sir Wilfull was to have made his addresses.

FOIBLE Then, then, madam, Mr. Mirabell waited for her in her  
chamber; but I would not tell your ladyship to discompose you  
when you were to receive Sir Rowland.

WAITWELL Enough, his date is short.<sup>9</sup>

FOIBLE No, good Sir Rowland, don't incur the law.

WAITWELL Law! I care not for law. I can but die, and 'tis in a good  
cause—my lady shall be satisfied of my truth and innocence,  
though it cost me my life.

LADY WISHFORT No, dear Sir Rowland, don't fight. If you should be  
killed I must never show my face—or be hanged—O, consider my  
reputation, Sir Rowland—no, you shan't fight—I'll go and examine  
my niece; I'll make her confess. I conjure you, Sir Rowland, by all  
your love not to fight.

WAITWELL I am charmed, madam, I obey. But some proof you must  
let me give you—I'll go for a black box, which contains the  
writings of my whole estate, and deliver that into your hands.

LADY WISHFORT Aye, dear Sir Rowland, that will be some comfort.  
Bring the black box.

WAITWELL And may I presume to bring a contract to be signed this  
night? May I hope so far?

LADY WISHFORT    Bring what you will; but come alive, pray come alive.  
O, this is a happy discovery.

WAITWELL    Dead or alive I'll come—and married we will be in spite of  
treachery; aye, and get an heir that shall defeat the last remaining  
glimpse of hope in my abandoned nephew. Come, my buxom  
widow:

E'er long you shall substantial proof receive  
That I'm an arrant<sup>1</sup> knight——

## FOIBLE    **Endnotes**

Or arrant knave.

- Note 1: Sprinkled with perfumed powder.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A rising.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The opening lines of a poem by Sir John Suckling. Impelled by her love to accept Mirabell, but reluctant to give herself, Millamant broods over poems that speak of the brief happiness of lovers and the falseness of men.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The first line of Edmund Waller's "The Story of Phoebus and Daphne Applied." In the flight of the virgin nymph from the embraces of the amorous god, Millamant finds an emblem of her relations with Mirabell.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Speak more openly.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The first lines of a song by Suckling, which she continues in her next lines.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: How's that?[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: To the new age with its classical taste, medieval art, especially architecture, seemed crude ("rude").[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Oh, the silly fellow (French); also the title of a comedy by Molière.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This, and the line that Mirabell caps it with, are also from Waller's "The Story of Phoebus and Daphne"



Applied." [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Intricate, laborious. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The grated door of a convent. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Self-assured, conceited. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Soft (pleasures) and morning naps (French). [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, Fondler. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Reserved. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In the first place (Latin), as in legal documents. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: I stipulate. "Item": used to introduce each item in a list. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Cosmetics were made of materials as repulsive as those that Mirabell names. "Vizards": masks. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rich silk fabrics. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, a crooked piece of firewood. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A sweet liqueur made of wine, honey, and spices. "Aniseed, cinnamon, citron and Barbados waters": alcoholic drinks. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sedatives. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A fabric made by mixing wool and silk; "unsized" because not stiffened with some glutinous substance. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A Latin phrase indicating the withdrawal of a lawsuit. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Spartans; people of few words. "Folios": books of the largest size. "Decimo sexto": a book of the smallest size. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The name of the ass in the beast epic *Reynard the Fox* (ca. 1175–1250). [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The two Roman deities, the twins Castor and Pollux, for whom one of the signs of the zodiac is named. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: I can argue successfully about matters less significant than you. [Return to reference 2](#)



- Note 3: Monkeys were supposed to eat spiders. Petulant scornfully contrasts what he imagines to be Witwoud's technique with his lady with his own more vigorous and direct program for the rest of the evening.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Rakish.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Drunkard (Spanish).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Grudge.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A wineglass filled to the brim. The word comes from the custom of touching (bumping) glasses when drinking toasts.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A coat of arms had a crest—a helmet surmounting the shield—and a motto. In his drunkenness, Sir Wilfull confuses the two.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In wine [there is] truth (Latin).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Throw.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fellow.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Candle maker.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Muslims do not drink alcohol.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Grand Mufti, head of the state religion of Turkey.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The shah of Persia.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Dung cart.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Punished by beating the soles of the feet.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Gamecock.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Inhabitant of Shropshire.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: St. Anthony (hence "Tantony"), the patron of swineherds, was represented accompanied by a pig.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A frame for stretching cloth on hooks so that it can dry without losing its original shape (compare this with the phrase "to be on tenterhooks").[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Consider.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A small pan inserted into a candlestick to catch the drippings of the candle.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Camphor was considered an effective antidote to sexual desire.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Immediately.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, one who carries a sedan chair during the hottest part of the summer. July and August are called the “dog days” because during these months the Dog Star, Sirius, rises and sets with the sun.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: He won’t live long.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The two words *errant* (“wandering,” as in “knight-errant”) and *arrant* (“thorough-going,” “notorious”) were originally the same and were still pronounced alike. This makes possible Foible’s pun.[Return to reference 1](#)

## ***Act 5—Scene continues***

[*Enter* LADY WISHFORT *and* FOIBLE.]

LADY WISHFORT Out of my house, out of my house, thou viper, thou serpent, that I have fostered; thou bosom traitress, that I raised from nothing.—Begone, begone, begone, go, go—that I took from washing of old gauze and weaving of dead hair,<sup>2</sup> with a bleak blue nose over a chafing dish of starved embers, and dining behind a traverse rag,<sup>3</sup> in a shop no bigger than a bird cage—go, go, starve again, do, do.

FOIBLE Dear madam, I'll beg pardon on my knees.

LADY WISHFORT Away, out, out, go set up for yourself again.—Do, drive a trade, do, with your three-pennyworth of small ware, flaunting upon a packthread, under a brandy-seller's bulk or against a dead wall<sup>4</sup> by a ballad-monger. Go, hang out an old frisoner-gorget, with a yard of yellow colberteen<sup>5</sup> again; do; an old gnawed mask, two rows of pins and a child's fiddle; a glass necklace with the beads broken, and a quilted nightcap with one ear. Go, go, drive a trade—these were your commodities, you treacherous trull, this was the merchandise you dealt in when I took you into my house, placed you next myself, and made you governante<sup>6</sup> of my whole family. You have forgot this, have you, now you have feathered your nest?

FOIBLE No, no, dear madam. Do but hear me, have but a moment's patience—I'll confess all. Mr. Mirabell seduced me; I am not the first that he has wheedled with his dissembling tongue. Your ladyship's own wisdom has been deluded by him, then how should I, a poor ignorant, defend myself? O madam, if you knew but what he promised me, and how he assured me your ladyship should come to no damage—or else the wealth of the Indies should not have bribed me to conspire against so good, so sweet, so kind a lady as you have been to me.

LADY WISHFORT No damage? What, to betray me, to marry me to a cast<sup>7</sup> servingman; to make me a receptacle, an hospital for a

decayed pimp? No damage? O, thou frontless<sup>8</sup> impudence, more than a big-bellied actress.

FOIBLE Pray do but hear me, madam. He could not marry your ladyship, madam.—No, indeed, his marriage was to have been void in law; for he was married to me first, to secure your ladyship. He could not have bedded your ladyship; for if he had consummated with your ladyship, he must have run the risk of the law, and been put upon his clergy.<sup>9</sup>—Yes, indeed, I inquired of the law in that case before I would meddle or make.<sup>1</sup>

LADY WISHFORT What, then I have been your property, have I? I have been convenient to you, it seems.—While you were catering for Mirabell, I have been broker for you? What, have you made a passive bawd of me?—This exceeds all precedent; I am brought to fine uses, to become a botcher of second-hand marriages between Abigails and Andrews!<sup>2</sup> I'll couple you. Yes, I'll baste you together, you and your philander.<sup>3</sup> I'll Duke's-Place<sup>4</sup> you, as I'm a person. Your turtle is in custody already: you shall coo in the same cage, if there be constable or warrant in the parish. [*Exit* LADY WISHFORT.]

FOIBLE O, that ever I was born, O, that I was ever married.—A bride, aye, I shall be a Bridewell-bride.<sup>5</sup> Oh!  
[*Enter* MRS. FAINALL.]

MRS. FAINALL Poor Foible, what's the matter?

FOIBLE O madam, my lady's gone for a constable. I shall be had to a justice, and put to Bridewell to beat hemp; poor Waitwell's gone to prison already.

MRS. FAINALL Have a good heart, Foible. Mirabell's gone to give security for him. This is all Marwood's and my husband's doing.

FOIBLE Yes, yes, I know it, madam; she was in my lady's closet, and overheard all that you said to me before dinner. She sent the letter to my lady; and that missing effect,<sup>6</sup> Mr. Fainall laid this plot to arrest Waitwell, when he pretended to go for the papers; and in the meantime Mrs. Marwood declared all to my lady.

MRS. FAINALL Was there no mention made of me in the letter?—My mother does not suspect my being in the confederacy? I fancy

Marwood has not told her, though she has told my husband.

FOIBLE Yes, madam; but my lady did not see that part. We stifled the letter before she read so far. Has that mischievous devil told Mr. Fainall of your ladyship then?

MRS. FAINALL Aye, all's out, my affair with Mirabell, everything discovered. This is the last day of our living together, that's my comfort.

FOIBLE Indeed, madam, and so 'tis a comfort if you knew all.—He has been even with your ladyship; which I could have told you long enough since, but I love to keep peace and quietness by my good will. I had rather bring friends together than set 'em at distance. But Mrs. Marwood and he are nearer related than ever their parents thought for!

MRS. FAINALL Say'st thou so, Foible? Canst thou prove this?

FOIBLE I can take my oath of it, madam. So can Mrs. Mincing; we have had many a fair word from Madam Marwood, to conceal something that passed in our chamber one evening when you were at Hyde Park—and we were thought to have gone a-walking; but we went up unawares—though we were sworn to secrecy too; Madam Marwood took a book and swore us upon it, but it was but a book of poems.—So long as it was not a Bible-oath, we may break it with a safe conscience.

MRS. FAINALL This discovery is the most opportune thing I could wish. Now, Mincing?

[*Enter* MINCING.]

MINCING My lady would speak with Mrs. Foible, mem. Mr. Mirabell is with her; he has set your spouse at liberty, Mrs. Foible, and would have you hide yourself in my lady's closet, till my old lady's anger is abated. O, my old lady is in a perilous passion, at something Mr. Fainall has said; he swears, and my old lady cries. There's a fearful hurricane, I vow. He says, mem, how that he'll have my lady's fortune made over to him, or he'll be divorced.

MRS. FAINALL Does your lady or Mirabell know that?

MINCING Yes, mem, they have sent me to see if Sir Wilfull be sober, and to bring him to them. My lady is resolved to have him, I think,

rather than lose such a vast sum as six thousand pound. O, come, Mrs. Foible, I hear my old lady.

MRS. FAINALL     Foible, you must tell Mincing that she must prepare to vouch when I call her.

FOIBLE     Yes, yes, madam.

MINCING     O yes, mem, I'll vouch anything for your ladyship's service, be what it will. [*Exit* MINCING, FOIBLE.]

[*Enter* LADY WISHFORT *and* MRS. MARWOOD.]

LADY WISHFORT     O my dear friend, how can I enumerate the benefit that I have received from your goodness? To you I owe the timely discovery of the false vows of Mirabell; to you I owe the detection of the imposter Sir Rowland. And now you are become an intercessor with my son-in-law, to save the honor of my house, and compound for the frailties of my daughter. Well, friend, you are enough to reconcile me to the bad world, or else I would retire to deserts and solitudes, and feed harmless sheep by groves and purling streams. Dear Marwood, let us leave the world and retire by ourselves and be shepherdesses.

MRS. MARWOOD     Let us first dispatch the affair in hand, madam. We shall have leisure to think of retirement afterwards. Here is one who is concerned in the treaty.

LADY WISHFORT     O daughter, daughter, is it possible thou should'st be my child, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh, and as I may say, another me, and yet transgress the most minute particle of severe virtue? Is it possible you should lean aside to iniquity, who have been cast in the direct mold of virtue? I have not only been a mold but a pattern for you, and a model for you, after you were brought into the world.

MRS. FAINALL     I don't understand your ladyship.

LADY WISHFORT     Not understand? Why, have you not been naught?<sup>7</sup> Have you not been sophisticated?<sup>8</sup> Not understand? Here I am ruined to compound<sup>9</sup> for your caprices and your cuckoldoms. I must pawn my plate and my jewels, and ruin my niece, and all little enough—

MRS. FAINALL I am wronged and abused, and so are you. 'Tis a false accusation, as false as hell, as false as your friend there, aye, or your friend's friend, my false husband.

MRS. MARWOOD My friend, Mrs. Fainall? Your husband my friend, what do you mean?

MRS. FAINALL I know what I mean, madam, and so do you; and so shall the world at a time convenient.

MRS. MARWOOD I am sorry to see you so passionate, madam. More temper<sup>1</sup> would look more like innocence. But I have done. I am sorry my zeal to serve your ladyship and family should admit of misconstruction, or make me liable to affront. You will pardon me, madam, if I meddle no more with an affair in which I am not personally concerned.

LADY WISHFORT O dear friend, I am so ashamed that you should meet with such returns.—You ought to ask pardon on your knees, ungrateful creature; she deserves more from you than all your life can accomplish—O, don't leave me destitute in this perplexity—no, stick to me, my good genius.

MRS. FAINALL I tell you, madam, you're abused—Stick to you? aye, like a leech, to suck your best blood—She'll drop off when she's full. Madam, you shan't pawn a bodkin, nor part with a brass counter, in composition for me.<sup>2</sup> I defy 'em all. Let 'em prove their aspersions; I know my own innocence, and dare stand a trial.  
[Exit MRS. FAINALL.]

LADY WISHFORT Why, if she should be innocent, if she should be wronged after all, ha? I don't know what to think—and I promise you, her education has been unexceptionable—I may say it; for I chiefly made it my own care to initiate her very infancy in the rudiments of virtue, and to impress upon her tender years a young odium and aversion to the very sight of men.—Aye, friend, she would have shrieked if she had but seen a man, till she was in her teens. As I'm a person, 'tis true—she was never suffered to play with a male child, though but in coats.<sup>3</sup> Nay, her very babies<sup>4</sup> were of the feminine gender—O, she never looked a man in the face but her own father, or the chaplain, and him we made a shift

to put upon her for a woman, by the help of his long garments, and his sleek face; till she was going in her fifteen.

MRS. MARWOOD 'Twas much she should be deceived so long.

LADY WISHFORT I warrant you, or she would never have borne to have been catechized by him; and have heard his long lectures against singing and dancing, and such debaucheries; and going to filthy plays; and profane music-meetings, where the lewd trebles squeek nothing but bawdry, and the basses roar blasphemy. O, she would have swooned at the sight or name of an obscene play-book—and can I think after all this, that my daughter can be naught? What, a whore? And thought it excommunication to set her foot within the door of a playhouse? O dear friend, I can't believe it, no, no; as she says, let him prove it, let him prove it.

MRS. MARWOOD Prove it, madam? What, and have your name prostituted in a public court; yours and your daughter's reputation worried at the bar by a pack of bawling lawyers? To be ushered in with an *O Yes* of scandal; and have your case opened by an old fumbler lecher in a quof<sup>5</sup> like a man midwife, to bring your daughter's infamy to light; to be a theme for legal punsters, and quibblers by the statute; and become a jest, against a rule of court, where there is no precedent for a jest in any record, not even in *Doomsday Book*; <sup>6</sup> to discompose the gravity of the bench, and provoke naughty interrogatories in more naughty law-Latin; while the good judge, tickled with the proceeding, simpers under a gray beard, and fidgets off and on his cushion as if he had swallowed cantharides, or sate upon cowhage.<sup>7</sup>

LADY WISHFORT O, 'tis very hard!

MRS. MARWOOD And then to have my young revelers of the Temple take notes, like 'prentices at a conventicle; and after talk it over again in commons,<sup>8</sup> or before drawers in an eating house.

LADY WISHFORT Worse and worse.

MRS. MARWOOD Nay, this is nothing; if it would end here 'twere well. But it must after this be consigned by the shorthand writers to the public press; and from thence be transferred to the hands, nay into the throats and lungs of hawkers, with voices more licentious



than the loud flounderman's or the woman that cries gray peas;<sup>9</sup>  
and this you must hear till you are stunned; nay, you must hear  
nothing else for some days.

LADY WISHFORT O, 'tis insupportable. No, no, dear friend, make it up,  
make it up; aye, aye, I'll compound. I'll give up all, myself and my  
all, my niece and her all—anything, everything for composition.

MRS. MARWOOD Nay, madam, I advise nothing; I only lay before you,  
as a friend, the inconveniencies which perhaps you have  
overseen.<sup>1</sup> Here comes Mr. Fainall. If he will be satisfied to huddle  
up all in silence, I shall be glad. You must think I would rather  
congratulate than condole with you.

[*Enter* FAINALL.]

LADY WISHFORT Aye, aye, I do not doubt it, dear Marwood. No, no, I  
do not doubt it.

FAINALL Well, madam; I have suffered myself to be overcome by  
the importunity of this lady, your friend, and am content you shall  
enjoy your own proper estate during life; on condition you oblige  
yourself never to marry, under such penalty as I think convenient.

LADY WISHFORT Never to marry?

FAINALL No more Sir Rowlands—the next imposture may not be so  
timely detected.

MRS. MARWOOD That condition, I dare answer, my lady will consent  
to, without difficulty; she has already but too much experienced  
the perfidiousness of men. Besides, madam, when we retire to our  
pastoral solitude we shall bid adieu to all other thoughts.

LADY WISHFORT Aye, that's true; but in case of necessity; as of  
health, or some such emergency—

FAINALL O, if you are prescribed marriage, you shall be considered;  
I will only reserve to myself the power to choose for you. If your  
physic be wholesome, it matters not who is your apothecary. Next,  
my wife shall settle on me the remainder of her fortune, not made  
over already; and for her maintenance depend entirely on my  
discretion.

LADY WISHFORT This is most inhumanly savage; exceeding the  
barbarity of a Muscovite husband.

FAINALL I learned it from His Czarish Majesty's retinue,<sup>2</sup> in a winter evening's conference over brandy and pepper, amongst other secrets of matrimony and policy, as they are at present practiced in the northern hemisphere. But this must be agreed unto, and that positively. Lastly, I will be endowed, in right of my wife, with that six thousand pound, which is the moiety of Mrs. Millamant's fortune in your possession; and which she has forfeited (as will appear by the last will and testament of your deceased husband, Sir Jonathan Wishfort) by her disobedience in contracting herself against your consent or knowledge; and by refusing the offered match with Sir Wilfull Witwoud, which you, like a careful aunt, had provided for her.

LADY WISHFORT My nephew was *non compos*,<sup>3</sup> and could not make his addresses.

FAINALL I come to make demands—I'll hear no objections.

LADY WISHFORT You will grant me time to consider?

FAINALL Yes, while the instrument<sup>4</sup> is drawing, to which you must set your hand till more sufficient deeds can be perfected: which I will take care shall be done with all possible speed. In the meanwhile I will go for the said instrument, and till my return you may balance this matter in your own discretion. [*Exit* FAINALL.]

LADY WISHFORT This insolence is beyond all precedent, all parallel; must I be subject to this merciless villain?

MRS. MARWOOD 'Tis severe indeed, madam, that you should smart for your daughter's wantonness.

LADY WISHFORT 'Twas against my consent that she married this barbarian, but she would have him, though her year was not out.<sup>5</sup>—Ah! her first husband, my son Languish, would not have carried it thus. Well, that was my choice, this is hers; she is matched now with a witness<sup>6</sup>—I shall be mad, dear friend. Is there no comfort for me? Must I live to be confiscated at this rebel-rate?—Here comes two more of my Egyptian plagues,<sup>7</sup> too.

[*Enter* MRS. MILLAMANT *and* SIR WILFULL.]

SIR WILFULL Aunt, your servant.

LADY WISHFORT Out, caterpillar, call not me aunt; I know thee not.

SIR WILFULL I confess I have been a little in disguise,<sup>8</sup> as they say—'Sheart! and I'm sorry for't. What would you have? I hope I committed no offense, aunt—and if I did, I am willing to make satisfaction; and what can a man say fairer? If I have broke anything, I'll pay for't, an' it cost a pound. And so let that content for what's past, and make no more words. For what's to come, to pleasure you I'm willing to marry my cousin. So, pray, let's all be friends. She and I are agreed upon the matter before a witness.

LADY WISHFORT How's this, dear niece? Have I any comfort? Can this be true?

MILLAMANT I am content to be a sacrifice to your repose, madam; and to convince you that I had no hand in the plot, as you were misinformed, I have laid my commands on Mirabell to come in person, and be a witness that I give my hand to this flower of knighthood; and for the contract that passed between Mirabell and me, I have obliged him to make a resignation of it in your ladyship's presence.—He is without, and waits your leave for admittance.

LADY WISHFORT Well, I'll swear I am something revived at this testimony of your obedience; but I cannot admit that traitor—I fear I cannot fortify myself to support his appearance. He is as terrible to me as a Gorgon;<sup>9</sup> if I see him, I fear I shall turn to stone, petrify incessantly.

MILLAMANT If you disoblige him, he may resent your refusal, and insist upon the contract still. Then 'tis the last time he will be offensive to you.

LADY WISHFORT Are you sure it will be the last time?—If I were sure of that—Shall I never see him again?

MILLAMANT Sir Wilfull, you and he are to travel together, are you not?

SIR WILFULL 'Sheart, the gentleman's a civil gentleman, aunt, let him come in; why, we are sworn brothers and fellow travelers. We are to be Pylades and Orestes,<sup>1</sup> he and I. He is to be my interpreter in foreign parts. He has been overseas once already; and with proviso that I marry my cousin, will cross 'em once again, only to

bear my company.—'Sheart, I'll call him in—an I set on't once, he shall come in; and see who'll hinder him. [*Exit* SIR WILFULL.]

MRS. MARWOOD This is precious fooling, if it would pass; but I'll know the bottom of it.

LADY WISHFORT O dear Marwood, you are not going?

MARWOOD Not far, madam; I'll return immediately. [*Exit* MRS. MARWOOD.]

[*Re-enter* SIR WILFULL *and* MIRABELL.]

SIR WILFULL [*Aside.*] Look up, man, I'll stand by you. 'Sbud an she do frown, she can't kill you—besides—harkee, she dare not frown desperately, because her face is none of her own. 'Sheart, an she should her forehead would wrinkle like the coat of a cream cheese; but mum for that, fellow traveler.

MIRABELL If a deep sense of the many injuries I have offered to so good a lady, with a sincere remorse, and a hearty contrition, can but obtain the least glance of compassion, I am too happy—Ah madam, there was a time—but let it be forgotten—I confess I have deservedly forfeited the high place I once held of sighing at your feet. Nay kill me not by turning from me in disdain—I come not to plead for favor—nay not for pardon. I am a suppliant only for pity—I am going where I never shall behold you more—

SIR WILFULL [*Aside.*] How, fellow traveler!—You shall go by yourself then.

MIRABELL Let me be pitied first, and afterwards forgotten—I ask no more.

SIR WILFULL By'r Lady a very reasonable request, and will cost you nothing, aunt.—Come, come, forgive and forget, aunt. Why you must, an you are a Christian.

MIRABELL Consider, madam, in reality you could not receive much prejudice; it was an innocent device, though I confess it had a face of guiltiness.—It was at most an artifice which love contrived—and errors which love produces have ever been accounted venial. At least think it is punishment enough that I have lost what in my heart I hold most dear, that to your cruel indignation, I have offered up this beauty, and with her my peace and quiet; nay, all my hopes of future comfort.

SIR WILFULL    An he does not move me, would I may never be o' the quorum<sup>2</sup>—An it were not as good a deed as to drink, to give her to him again—I would I might never take shipping.—Aunt, if you don't forgive quickly I shall melt, I can tell you that. My contract went no farther than a little mouth glue,<sup>3</sup> and that's hardly dry.—One doleful sigh more from my fellow traveler and 'tis dissolved.

LADY WISHFORT    Well, nephew, upon your account—Ah, he has a false insinuating tongue.—Well, sir, I will stifle my just resentment at my nephew's request. I will endeavor what I can to forget—but on proviso that you resign the contract with my niece immediately.

MIRABELL    It is in writing and with papers of concern, but I have sent my servant for it and will deliver it to you, with all acknowledgements for your transcendent goodness.

LADY WISHFORT    [*Aside.*] O, he has witchcraft in his eyes and tongue; when I did not see him I could have bribed a villain to his assassination; but his appearance rakes the embers which have so long lain smothered in my breast.—

[*Enter* FAINALL *and* MRS. MARWOOD.]

FAINALL    Your date of deliberation, madam, is expired. Here is the instrument; are you prepared to sign?

LADY WISHFORT    If I were prepared, I am not empowered. My niece exerts a lawful claim, having matched herself by my direction to Sir Wilfull.

FAINALL    That sham is too gross to pass on me—though 'tis imposed on you, madam.

MILLAMANT    Sir, I have given my consent.

MIRABELL    And, sir, I have resigned my pretensions.

SIR WILFULL    And, sir, I assert my right; and will maintain it in defiance of you, sir, and of your instrument. 'Sheart, an you talk of an instrument, sir, I have an old fox by my thigh shall hack your instrument of ram vellum<sup>4</sup> to shreds, sir. It shall not be sufficient for a *mittimus*<sup>5</sup> or a tailor's measure; therefore withdraw your instrument, sir, or by'r Lady I shall draw mine.

LADY WISHFORT    Hold, nephew, hold.

MILLAMANT    Good Sir Wilfull, respite your valor.

FAINALL    Indeed? Are you provided of your guard, with your single beefeater<sup>6</sup> there? But I'm prepared for you; and insist upon my first proposal. You shall submit your own estate to my management and absolutely make over my wife's to my sole use, as pursuant to the purport and tenor of this other covenant. I suppose, madam, your consent is not requisite in this case; nor, Mr. Mirabell, your resignation; nor, Sir Wilfull, your right—You may draw your fox if you please, sir, and make a bear garden<sup>7</sup> flourish somewhere else: for here it will not avail. This, my Lady Wishfort, must be subscribed, or your darling daughter's turned adrift, like a leaky hulk to sink or swim, as she and the current of this lewd town can agree.

LADY WISHFORT    Is there no means, no remedy, to stop my ruin? Ungrateful wretch! Dost thou not owe thy being, thy subsistence to my daughter's fortune?

FAINALL    I'll answer you when I have the rest of it in my possession.

MIRABELL    But that you would not accept of a remedy from my hands—I own I have not deserved you should owe any obligation to me; or else perhaps I could advise—

LADY WISHFORT    O, what? what? to save me and my child from ruin, from want, I'll forgive all that's past; nay, I'll consent to anything to come, to be delivered from this tyranny.

MIRABELL    Aye, madam, but that is too late; my reward is intercepted. You have disposed of her who only could have made me a compensation for all my services; but be it as it may, I am resolved I'll serve you. You shall not be wronged in this savage manner.

LADY WISHFORT    How! Dear Mr. Mirabell, can you be so generous at last! But it is not possible. Harkee, I'll break my nephew's match, you shall have my niece yet, and all her fortune, if you can but save me from this imminent danger.

MIRABELL    Will you? I take you at your word. I ask no more. I must have leave for two criminals to appear.

LADY WISHFORT    Aye, aye, anybody, anybody.

MIRABELL    Foible is one, and a penitent.

[*Enter* MRS. FAINALL, FOIBLE, *and* MINCING.]

MRS. MARWOOD O, my shame! These corrupt things are brought hither to expose me.

[MIRABELL *and* LADY WISHFORT *go to* MRS. FAINALL *and* FOIBLE.]

FAINALL If it must all come out, why let 'em know it, 'tis but *the way of the world*. That shall not urge me to relinquish or abate one tittle of my terms; no, I will insist the more.

FOIBLE Yes, indeed, madam, I'll take my Bible-oath of it.

MINCING And so will I, mem.

LADY WISHFORT O Marwood, Marwood, art thou false? My friend deceive me? Hast thou been a wicked accomplice with that profligate man?

MRS. MARWOOD Have you so much ingratitude and injustice, to give credit against your friend to the aspersions of two such mercenary trulls?

MINCING Mercenary, mem? I scorn your words. 'Tis true we found you and Mr. Fainall in the blue garret; by the same token, you swore us to secrecy upon Messalina's<sup>8</sup> poems. Mercenary? No, if we would have been mercenary, we should have held our tongues; you would have bribed us sufficiently.

FAINALL Go, you are an insignificant thing. Well, what are you the better for this! Is this Mr. Mirabell's expedient? I'll be put off no longer. You, thing that was a wife, shall smart for this. I will not leave thee wherewithal to hide thy shame: your body shall be naked as your reputation.

MRS. FAINALL I despise you and defy your malice.—You have aspersed me wrongfully.—I have proved your falsehood.—Go, you and your treacherous—I will not name it, but starve together—perish.

FAINALL Not while you are worth a groat, indeed, my dear. Madam, I'll be fooled no longer.

LADY WISHFORT Ah, Mr. Mirabell, this is small comfort, the detection of this affair.

MIRABELL O, in good time—Your leave for the other offender and penitent to appear, madam.



[*Enter WAITWELL with a box of writings.*]

LADY WISHFORT O Sir Rowland—Well, rascal.

WAITWELL What your ladyship pleases—I have brought the black box at last, madam.

MIRABELL Give it me. Madam, you remember your promise.

LADY WISHFORT Aye, dear sir.

MIRABELL Where are the gentlemen?

WAITWELL At hand, sir, rubbing their eyes, just risen from sleep.

FAINALL 'Sdeath, what's this to me? I'll not wait your private concerns.

[*Enter PETULANT and WITWOUD.*]

PETULANT How now? What's the matter? Whose hand's out?<sup>9</sup>

WITWOUD Heyday! What, are you all got together, like players at the end of the last act?

MIRABELL You may remember, gentlemen, I once requested your hands as witnesses to a certain parchment.

WITWOUD Aye, I do, my hand I remember—Petulant set his mark.

MIRABELL You wrong him, his name is fairly written, as shall appear. You do not remember, gentlemen, anything of what that parchment

contained—[*Undoing the box.*]

WITWOUD No.

PETULANT Not I. I writ, I read nothing.

MIRABELL Very well, now you shall know. Madam, your promise.

LADY WISHFORT Aye, aye, sir, upon my honor.

MIRABELL Mr. Fainall, it is now time that you should know that your lady, while she was at her own disposal, and before you had by your insinuations wheedled her out of a pretended settlement of the greatest part of her fortune—

FAINALL Sir! Pretended!

MIRABELL Yes, sir. I say that this lady while a widow, having, it seems, received some cautions respecting your inconstancy and tyranny of temper, which from her own partial opinion and fondness of you she could never have suspected—she did, I say, by the wholesome advice of friends and of sages learned in the



laws of this land, deliver this same as her act and deed to me in trust, and to the uses within mentioned. You may read if you please—[*Holding out the parchment.*—]—though perhaps what is written on the back may serve your occasions.

FAINALL Very likely, sir. What's here? Damnation!—[*Reads.*] *A deed of conveyance of the whole estate real of Arabella Languish, widow, in trust to Edward Mirabell.* Confusion!

MIRABELL Even so, sir, 'tis the way of the world, sir; of the widows of the world. I suppose this deed may bear an elder date than what you have obtained from your lady.

FAINALL Perfidious fiend! Then thus I'll be revenged.

[*Offers to run at* MRS. FAINALL.]

SIR WILFULL Hold, sir, now you may make your bear garden flourish somewhere else, sir.

FAINALL Mirabell, you shall hear of this, sir, be sure you shall. Let me pass, oaf. [*Exit* FAINALL.]

MRS. FAINALL Madam, you seem to stifle your resentment: you had better give it vent.

MRS. MARWOOD Yes, it shall have vent—and to your confusion, or I'll perish in the attempt. [*Exit* MRS. MARWOOD.]

LADY WISHFORT O daughter, daughter, 'tis plain thou hast inherited thy mother's prudence.

MRS. FAINALL Thank Mr. Mirabell, a cautious friend, to whose advice all is owing.

LADY WISHFORT Well, Mr. Mirabell, you have kept your promise and I must perform mine. First I pardon for your sake Sir Rowland there and Foible.—The next thing is to break the matter to my nephew—and how to do that—

MIRABELL For that, madam, give yourself no trouble—let me have your consent.—Sir Wilfull is my friend; he has had compassion upon lovers, and generously engaged a volunteer in this action, for our service; and now designs to prosecute his travels.

SIR WILFULL 'Sheart, aunt, I have no mind to marry. My cousin's a fine lady, and the gentleman loves her, and she loves him, and they deserve one another. My resolution is to see foreign parts—I

have set on't—and when I'm set on't, I must do't. And if these two gentlemen would travel too, I think they may be spared.

PETULANT For my part, I say little—I think things are best off or on.

WITWOUND Igad, I understand nothing of the matter—I'm in a maze yet; like a dog in a dancing school.

LADY WISHFORT Well, sir, take her, and with her all the joy I can give you.

MILLAMANT Why does not the man take me? Would you have me give myself to you over again?

MIRABELL Aye, and over and over again—[*Kisses her hand.*—I would have you as often as possibly I can. Well, Heaven grant I love you not too well, that's all my fear.

SIR WILFULL 'Sheart, you'll have time enough to toy after you're married; or if you will toy now, let us have a dance in the meantime; that we who are not lovers may have some other employment, besides looking on.

MIRABELL With all my heart, dear Sir Wilfull. What shall we do for music?

FOIBLE O, sir, some that were provided for Sir Rowland's entertainment are yet within call.

[A DANCE.]

LADY WISHFORT As I am a person I can hold out no longer.—I have wasted my spirits so today already, that I am ready to sink under the fatigue; and I cannot but have some fears upon me yet, that my son Fainall will pursue some desperate course.

MIRABELL Madam, disquiet not yourself on that account; to my knowledge his circumstances are such, he must of force comply. For my part, I will contribute all that in me lies to a reunion: in the meantime, madam—[*To MRS. FAINALL.*—let me before these witnesses restore to you this deed of trust; it may be a means, well managed, to make you live easily together.

From hence let those be warned, who mean to wed;  
Lest mutual falsehood stain the bridal bed:

For each deceiver to his cost may find,  
That marriage frauds too oft are paid in kind.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Foible had been a wigmaker.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A worn cloth, used to curtain off part of a room.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A continuous, unbroken wall. "Bulk": stall.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A French imitation of Italian lace. "Frisoneer-gorget": a woolen garment that covers the neck and breast.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Housekeeper.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Cast off, discharged.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Shameless.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, pleaded "benefit of clergy," originally the privilege of the clergy to be tried for felony before ecclesiastical, not secular, courts. By Congreve's time it had become the privilege to plead exemption from a penal sentence granted a person who could read and was a first offender.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A dialectal phrase; the two words mean approximately the same thing.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Generic names for maidservants and serving-men. "Botcher": a mender of old clothes. Lady Wishfort means something like "a patcher-up of marriages."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lover. "Baste": sew together loosely.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Notorious for its thriving trade in unlicensed marriages.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: House of correction for women, in London.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Not working.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Wicked. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Corrupted. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, come to terms by making a monetary settlement. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Moderation. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: To settle my debts. "Bodkin": ornamental hairpin. "Brass counter": an imitation coin, used in games of chance. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the dress common to young children of both genders. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Dolls. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The cap of a sergeant-at-law. "O Yes": The formula for opening court, a variant of Old French *Oyez*, "Hear ye." [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Or Domesday Book, the survey of England made in 1085–86 by William the Conqueror. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A plant that causes intolerable itching. "Fidges": fidgets. "Cantharides": Spanish fly, an irritant. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In the dining hall. "Revelers": here, law students. The Temple is one of the Inns of Court. "Conventicle": clandestine meeting of Protestant Dissenters. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Street vendors known for their stridency. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Overlooked. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Peter the Great of Russia visited London in 1698. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, *non compos mentis* (of unsound mind, Latin). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Legal contract. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The conventional period of mourning for a widow was one year. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: With a vengeance. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The plagues visited by God on Pharaoh until he agreed to release the Israelites from bondage (Exodus 7–12). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Drunk. [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: In Greek mythology, a hideous monster with snakes in her hair. Her glance turned people to stone.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Pylades was the constant friend who journeyed with Orestes, the son and avenger of the murdered king Agamemnon.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Justices of the peace, who were required to be present at the sessions of a court.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Literally, glue to be used by moistening with the tongue; but here, “glue made of mere words” and therefore not binding.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The legal instrument to be signed is written on vellum. “Fox”: a kind of sword.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A warrant, committing a felon to jail.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Yeoman of the guard.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The place for bear baiting, frequented by a vulgar and unruly crowd. “Draw”: track by scent.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Mincing means *Miscellany*, a collection of poems by various writers, such as Dryden’s popular *Miscellanies*. Messalina was the viciously debauched wife of the Roman emperor Claudius.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, Whose game’s over?[Return to reference 9](#)

## ***Epilogue***

SPOKEN BY MRS. BRACEGIRDLE<sup>1</sup>

After our Epilogue this crowd dismisses,  
I'm thinking how this play'll be pulled to pieces.  
But pray consider, e'er you doom its fall,  
How hard a thing 'twould be to please you all.  
5 There are some critics so with spleen diseased,  
They scarcely come inclining to be pleased;  
And sure he must have more than mortal skill,  
Who pleases anyone against his will.  
Then, all bad poets we are sure are foes,  
10 And how their number's swelled the town well  
knows:  
In shoals, I've marked 'em judging in the pit;  
Though they're on no pretence for judgment  
fit,  
But that they have been damned for want of  
wit.  
Since when, they by their own offenses taught  
Set up for spies on plays, and finding fault.  
15 Others there are whose malice we'd prevent;  
Such, who watch plays, with scurrilous  
intent  
To mark out who by characters are meant.  
And though no perfect likeness they can trace,  
Yet each pretends to know the copied face.  
20 These, with false glosses feed their own ill-nature,  
And turn to libel, what was meant a *satire*.<sup>2</sup>  
May such malicious fops this fortune find,  
To think themselves alone the fools designed:  
If any are so arrogantly vain,  
25 To think they singly can support a scene,  
And furnish fool enough to entertain.

For well the learn'd and the judicious know,  
 That satire scorns to stoop so  
     meanly low,  
 30 As any one abstracted<sup>o</sup> fop to show.  
 For, as when painters form a  
     matchless face,  
 They from each fair one catch some different grace,  
 And shining features in one portrait blend,  
 To which no single beauty must pretend:  
 35 So poets oft do in one piece expose  
 Whole *belles assemblées* of coquettes and beaux.

## Endnotes

1700

- Note 1: Anne Bracegirdle (ca. 1663–1748), the most brilliant actress of her generation. She created the role of Millamant. Congreve loved her, and it was rumored that they were secretly married.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *nā-ter* and *sā-ter*.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *separated*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

**JOSEPH ADDISON *and* SIR  
RICHARD STEELE  
1672–1719                      1672–1729**

The friendship of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele began when they were schoolboys together in London. Their careers ran parallel courses and brought them for a while into fruitful collaboration. Addison, although charming when among friends, was by nature reserved, calculating, and prudent. Steele was impulsive and rakish when young (but ardently devoted to his wife), often imprudent, and frequently in want of money. Addison never stumbled in his progress to financial security, a late marriage to a widowed countess, and a successful political career; walking less surely, Steele experienced many vicissitudes and faced serious financial problems during his last years.

Both men attended Oxford, where Addison took his degree, won a fellowship, and gained a reputation for Latin verse; the less scholarly Steele left the university before earning a degree to take a commission in the army. For a while he cut a dashing figure in London, even, to his horror, seriously wounding a man in a duel. Both men enjoyed the patronage of the great Whig magnates; and except during the last four years of Queen Anne's reign, when the Tories were in the ascendancy, they were generously treated. Steele edited and wrote the *London Gazette*, an official newspaper that normally appeared twice a week, listing government appointments



and reporting domestic and foreign news—much like a modern paper. He served in Parliament, was knighted by George I, and later became manager of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Addison held more important positions: he was secretary to the lord lieutenant of Ireland and later an undersecretary of state; finally, toward the end of his life, he became secretary of state. Both men wrote plays: Addison's *Cato*, a frigid and very "correct" tragedy, had great success in 1713, and Steele's later plays at Drury Lane (especially *The Conscious Lovers*, 1722) were instrumental in establishing the popularity of sentimental comedy throughout the eighteenth century.

Steele's debts and Addison's loss of office in 1710 drove them to journalistic enterprises, through which they developed one of the most characteristic types of eighteenth-century literature, the periodical essay. Steele's experience as gazetteer had involved him in journalism and, in need of money, in 1709 he launched the *Tatler* under the pseudonym Isaac Bickerstaff. He sought to attract the largest possible audience: the title was a bid for women readers, and the mixture of news with personal reflections soon became popular in coffeehouses and at breakfast tables. The paper appeared three times a week from April 1709 to January 1711. Steele wrote by far the greater number of *Tatlers*, but Addison contributed helpfully, as did other friends. When the *Spectator* began its run two months after the last *Tatler*, the new periodical drew on and expanded the readership Steele had reached and influenced. The *Spectator* appeared daily except Sunday from March 1711 to December 1712 (and was briefly resumed by Addison in 1714). It was the joint undertaking of the two friends, although it was dominated by Addison. Both the *Spectator* and the *Tatler* had many imitators in their own day and throughout the rest of the century. There was a *Female Tatler* and a *Female Spectator*, as well as Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* and *Idler* and Oliver Goldsmith's brief *Bee*.

The periodical writing of Addison and Steele is remarkable for its comprehensive attention to diverse aspects of English life—good manners, daily happenings in London, going to church, shopping, investing in the stock market, the fascinations of trade and

commerce, proper gender roles and relations, the personality types found in society, the town's offerings of high and low entertainment, tastes in literature and luxury goods, philosophical speculations—and the seamless way all were shown to be elements of a single vast, agreeable world. In this unifying spirit, both Steele and Addison set the divisive political battles of the day, so vigorously fought in other periodicals and newspapers, at a distance: they portray the ardor for political dispute more as a personal quirk than as a provocation to true civil unrest. Less formal and didactic than the essays of Francis Bacon, less personal than those of Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt in the next century, these essays promote morality among their readers by praising and enacting sociability and set standards of good taste and polite behavior with a light but firm and unwavering grace. They thereby sought to establish a new social-literary ethos transcending the narrowness of Puritan morality and the exorbitance of the fashionable court culture of the last century.

In the *Spectator*, Steele and especially Addison set out to break down the distinction between educating their readers and entertaining them with winning characters, vivid scenes, and even playfully visionary allegories. In the second number, Steele introduces us to the members of Mr. Spectator's Club: a man about town, a student of law and literature, a churchman, a soldier, a Tory country squire, and—interestingly enough—a London merchant. The development of these characters shows how the very manner in which the *Spectator* makes distinctions tends to smooth away conflict. As a Whig, Steele sympathized with the new moneyed class in London and evidently intended to pit the merchant Sir Andrew Freeport, the representative of the new order, against the Tory Sir Roger de Coverley, representative of the one passing away. Addison, however, preferred to present Sir Roger in episodes set in town and in country as an endearing, eccentric character, often absurd but always amiable and innocent. He is a prominent ancestor of a long line of similar characters in fiction in the following two centuries. Addison's scholarly interests broadened the material to include not only social criticism but the popularization of current philosophical

and scientific notions. He wrote important critical papers distinguishing true and false wit; an extended series of Saturday essays evaluating *Paradise Lost*; and an influential series on "the pleasures of the imagination," which treated the visual effect of beautiful, "great," and uncommon objects in nature and art. Altogether, the *Spectator* fulfilled his ambition (outlined in "The Aims of the Spectator") to be considered an agreeable modern Socrates.

The best description of Addison's prose is Samuel Johnson's in his *Life of Addison*: "His prose is the model of the middle style; on grave subjects not formal, on light occasions not groveling; pure without scrupulosity, and exact without apparent elaboration; always equable, and always easy, without glowing words or pointed sentences." And he concludes: "Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison"—a course of study that a good many aspiring writers during the century seem to have undertaken.

## STEELE: [The Spectator's Club]

**The Spectator 2, Friday, March 2, 1711**

—*Ast alii sex*

*Et plures uno conclamant ore.*<sup>1</sup>

—JUVENAL, *Satire* 7.167–68

The first of our society is a gentleman of Worcestershire, of ancient descent, a baronet, his name Sir Roger de Coverley. His great-grandfather was inventor of that famous country-dance which is called after him. All who know the shire are very well acquainted with the parts and merits of Sir Roger. He is a gentleman that is very singular in his behavior, but his singularities proceed from his good sense, and are contradictions to the manners of the world only as he thinks the world is in the wrong. However, this humor creates him no enemies, for he does nothing with sourness or obstinacy; and his being unconfined to modes and forms<sup>2</sup> makes him but the readier and more capable to please and oblige all who know him. When he is in town, he lives in Soho Square. It is said he keeps himself a bachelor by reason he was crossed in love by a perverse, beautiful widow of the next county to him. Before this disappointment, Sir Roger was what you call a fine gentleman, had often supped with my Lord Rochester and Sir George Etherege, fought a duel upon his first coming to town, and kicked Bully Dawson<sup>3</sup> in a public coffeehouse for calling him “youngster.” But being ill used by the above-mentioned widow, he was very serious for a year and a half; and though, his temper being naturally jovial, he at last got over it, he grew careless of himself, and never dressed afterwards. He continues to wear a coat and doublet of the same cut that were in fashion at the time of his repulse, which, in his merry humors, he tells us, has been in and out twelve times since he first wore it. 'Tis

said Sir Roger grew humble in his desires after he had forgot this cruel beauty, insomuch that it is reported he has frequently offended in point of chastity with beggars and gypsies; but this is looked upon by his friends rather as matter of raillery than truth. He is now in his fifty-sixth year, cheerful, gay, and hearty; keeps a good house both in town and country; a great lover of mankind; but there is such a mirthful cast in his behavior that he is rather beloved than esteemed. His tenants grow rich, his servants look satisfied, all the young women profess love to him, and the young men are glad of his company; when he comes into a house he calls the servants by their names, and talks all the way upstairs to a visit. I must not omit that Sir Roger is a justice of the quorum, that he fills the chair at a quarter-session with great abilities; and, three months ago, gained universal applause by explaining a passage in the Game Act.<sup>4</sup>

The gentleman next in esteem and authority among us is another bachelor, who is a member of the Inner Temple; a man of great probity, wit, and understanding; but he has chosen his place of residence rather to obey the direction of an old humorsome<sup>5</sup> father, than in pursuit of his own inclinations. He was placed there to study the laws of the land, and is the most learned of any of the house in those of the stage. Aristotle and Longinus are much better understood by him than Littleton or Coke.<sup>6</sup> The father sends up, every post, questions relating to marriage articles, leases, and tenures, in the neighborhood; all which questions he agrees with an attorney to answer and take care of in the lump. He is studying the passions themselves, when he should be inquiring into the debates among men which arise from them. He knows the argument of each of the orations of Demosthenes and Tully,<sup>7</sup> but not one case in the reports of our own courts. No one ever took him for a fool, but none, except his intimate friends, know he has a great deal of wit. This turn makes him at once both disinterested and agreeable; as few of his thoughts are drawn from business, they are most of them fit for conversation. His taste of books is a little too just<sup>8</sup> for the age he lives in; he has read all, but approves of very few. His familiarity with the customs, manners, actions, and writings of the ancients

makes him a very delicate observer of what occurs to him in the present world. He is an excellent critic, and the time of the play is his hour of business; exactly at five he passes through New Inn, crosses through Russell Court, and takes a turn at Will's till the play begins; he has his shoes rubbed and his periwig powdered at the barber's as you go into the Rose.<sup>9</sup> It is for the good of the audience when he is at a play, for the actors have an ambition to please him.

The person of next consideration is Sir Andrew Freeport, a merchant of great eminence in the city of London, a person of indefatigable industry, strong reason, and great experience. His notions of trade are noble and generous, and (as every rich man has usually some sly way of jesting which would make no great figure were he not a rich man) he calls the sea the British Common. He is acquainted with commerce in all its parts, and will tell you that it is a stupid and barbarous way to extend dominion by arms; for true power is to be got by arts and industry. He will often argue that if this part of our trade were well cultivated, we should gain from one nation; and if another, from another. I have heard him prove that diligence makes more lasting acquisitions than valor, and that sloth has ruined more nations than the sword. He abounds in several frugal maxims, among which the greatest favorite is, "A penny saved is a penny got." A general trader of good sense is pleasanter company than a general scholar; and Sir Andrew having a natural unaffected eloquence, the perspicuity of his discourse gives the same pleasure that wit would in another man. He has made his fortunes himself, and says that England may be richer than other kingdoms by as plain methods as he himself is richer than other men; though at the same time I can say this of him, that there is not a point in the compass but blows home a ship in which he is an owner.

Next to Sir Andrew in the clubroom sits Captain Sentry, a gentleman of great courage, good understanding, but invincible modesty. He is one of those that deserve very well, but are very awkward at putting their talents within the observation of such as should take notice of them. He was some years a captain, and

behaved himself with great gallantry in several engagements and at several sieges; but having a small estate of his own, and being next heir to Sir Roger, he has quitted a way of life in which no man can rise suitably to his merit who is not something of a courtier as well as a soldier. I have heard him often lament that in a profession where merit is placed in so conspicuous a view, impudence should get the better of modesty. When he has talked to this purpose I never heard him make a sour expression, but frankly confess that he left the world because he was not fit for it. A strict honesty and an even, regular behavior are in themselves obstacles to him that must press through crowds who endeavor at the same end with himself—the favor of a commander. He will, however, in his way of talk, excuse generals for not disposing according to men's desert, or inquiring into it, "for," says he, "that great man who has a mind to help me, has as many to break through to come at me as I have to come at him"; therefore he will conclude that the man who would make a figure, especially in a military way, must get over all false modesty, and assist his patron against the importunity of other pretenders by a proper assurance in his own vindication. He says it is a civil cowardice to be backward in asserting<sup>1</sup> what you ought to expect, as it is a military fear to be slow in attacking when it is your duty. With this candor does the gentleman speak of himself and others. The same frankness runs through all his conversation. The military part of his life has furnished him with many adventures, in the relation of which he is very agreeable to the company; for he is never overbearing, though accustomed to command men in the utmost degree below him; nor ever too obsequious from an habit of obeying men highly above him.

But that our society may not appear a set of humorists<sup>2</sup> unacquainted with the gallantries and pleasures of the age, we have among us the gallant Will Honeycomb, a gentleman who, according to his years, should be in the decline of his life, but having ever been very careful of his person, and always had a very easy fortune, time has made but very little impression either by wrinkles on his forehead or traces in his brain. His person is well turned, of a good

height. He is very ready at that sort of discourse with which men usually entertain women. He has all his life dressed very well, and remembers habits<sup>3</sup> as others do men. He can smile when one speaks to him, and laughs easily. He knows the history of every mode, and can inform you from which of the French king's wenches our wives and daughters had this manner of curling their hair, that way of placing their hoods; whose frailty was covered by such a sort of petticoat, and whose vanity to show her foot made that part of the dress so short in such a year. In a word, all his conversation and knowledge has been in the female world. As other men of his age will take notice to you what such a minister said upon such and such an occasion, he will tell you when the Duke of Monmouth<sup>4</sup> danced at court such a woman was then smitten, another was taken with him at the head of his troop in the Park. In all these important relations, he has ever about the same time received a kind glance or a blow of a fan from some celebrated beauty, mother of the present Lord Such-a-one. If you speak of a young commoner that said a lively thing in the House, he starts up: "He has good blood in his veins; Tom Mirabell begot him, the rogue cheated me in that affair; that young fellow's mother used me more like a dog than any woman I ever made advances to." This way of talking of his very much enlivens the conversation among us of a more sedate turn; and I find there is not one of the company but myself, who rarely speak at all, but speaks of him as of that sort of man who is usually called a well-bred, fine gentleman. To conclude his character, where women are not concerned he is an honest, worthy man.

I cannot tell whether I am to account him whom I am next to speak of as one of our company, for he visits us but seldom; but when he does, it adds to every man else a new enjoyment of himself. He is a clergyman, a very philosophic man, of general learning, great sanctity of life, and the most exact good breeding. He has the misfortune to be of a very weak constitution, and consequently cannot accept of such cares and business as preferments in his function would oblige him to; he is therefore among divines what a chamber-counselor<sup>5</sup> is among lawyers. The



probity of his mind and the integrity of his life create him followers, as being eloquent or loud advances others. He seldom introduces the subject he speaks upon; but we are so far gone in years that he observes, when he is among us, an earnestness to have him fall on some divine topic, which he always treats with much authority, as one who has no interest in this world, as one who is hastening to the object of all his wishes and conceives hope from his decays and infirmities. These are my ordinary companions.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Six more at least join their consenting voice (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Social conventions.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Notorious cardsharp of the period. John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester (1647–1680), British poet; Etherege (ca. 1634–1691), playwright, rake, and close companion of the king and Rochester.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In 1671 the act gave the gentry (Sir Roger's class) broad legal powers to prevent poaching and hence granted them a virtual monopoly on hunting. "Justice of the quorum": a country justice of the peace, presiding over quarterly sessions of the court.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Temperamental. "Inner Temple": one of the Inns of Court, where lawyers resided or had their offices and where students studied law.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In other words, he is more familiar with the laws of literature than those of England. The *Poetics* of Aristotle and the Greek treatise *On the Sublime* (reputedly by Longinus) were in high favor among the critics of the time. Sir Thomas Littleton, 15th-century jurist, was author of a renowned treatise on *Tenures*. Sir Edward Coke (1552–1634) was the judge and writer whose *Reports* and *Institutes of the Laws of England* (known as *Coke upon Littleton*) have exerted a great influence on the interpretation of English law.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Marcus Tullius Cicero.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Exact.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A tavern near Drury Lane. "Will's": the coffeehouse in Covent Garden associated with literature and criticism since Dryden had begun to frequent it in the 1660s.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Claiming.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Eccentrics.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Clothes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The illegitimate son of Charles II, the ill-fated "Absalom" of Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A lawyer who gives opinions in private, not in court.[Return to reference 5](#)

## ADDISON: [The Aims of the *Spectator*]

**The Spectator 10, Monday, March 12, 1711**

*Non aliter quam qui adverso vix flumine lembum  
Remigiis subigit, si bracchia forte remisit,  
Atque illum in præceps prono rapit alveus amni.*<sup>1</sup>  
—VIRGIL, *Georgics* 1.201–3

It is with much satisfaction that I hear this great city inquiring day by day after these my papers, and receiving my morning lectures with a becoming seriousness and attention. My publisher tells me that there are already three thousand of them distributed every day. So that if I allow twenty readers to every paper, which I look upon as a modest computation, I may reckon about three-score thousand disciples in London and Westminster, who I hope will take care to distinguish themselves from the thoughtless herd of their ignorant and unattentive brethren. Since I have raised to myself so great an audience, I shall spare no pains to make their instruction agreeable, and their diversion useful. For which reasons I shall endeavor to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality, that my readers may, if possible, both ways find their account in the speculation of the day. And to the end that their virtue and discretion may not be short, transient, intermitting starts of thought, I have resolved to refresh their memories from day to day, till I have recovered them out of that desperate state of vice and folly into which the age is fallen. The mind that lies fallow but a single day sprouts up in follies that are only to be killed by a constant and assiduous culture. It was said of Socrates that he brought philosophy down from heaven, to inhabit among men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me that I have brought philosophy out of closets<sup>2</sup>

and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea tables and in coffeehouses.

I would therefore in a very particular manner recommend these my speculations to all well-regulated families that set apart an hour in every morning for tea and bread and butter; and would earnestly advise them for their good to order this paper to be punctually served up, and to be looked upon as a part of the tea equipage.

Sir Francis Bacon observes that a well-written book, compared with its rivals and antagonists, is like Moses's serpent, that immediately swallowed up and devoured those of the Egyptians.<sup>3</sup> I shall not be so vain as to think that where *The Spectator* appears the other public prints will vanish; but shall leave it to my reader's consideration whether it is not much better to be let into the knowledge of one's self, than to hear what passes in Muscovy or Poland; and to amuse ourselves with such writings as tend to the wearing out of ignorance, passion, and prejudice, than such as naturally conduce to inflame hatreds, and make enmities irreconcilable?

In the next place, I would recommend this paper to the daily perusal of those gentlemen whom I cannot but consider as my good brothers and allies, I mean the fraternity of spectators who live in the world without having anything to do in it; and either by the affluence of their fortunes or laziness of their dispositions have no other business with the rest of mankind but to look upon them. Under this class of men are comprehended all contemplative tradesmen, titular physicians, fellows of the Royal Society, Templars<sup>4</sup> that are not given to be contentious, and statesmen that are out of business; in short, everyone that considers the world as a theater, and desires to form a right judgment of those who are the actors on it.

There is another set of men that I must likewise lay a claim to, whom I have lately called the blanks of society, as being altogether unfurnished with ideas, till the business and conversation of the day has supplied them. I have often considered these poor souls with an eye of great commiseration, when I have heard them asking the first

man they have met with, whether there was any news stirring? and by that means gathering together materials for thinking. These needy persons do not know what to talk of till about twelve o'clock in the morning; for by that time they are pretty good judges of the weather, know which way the wind sits, and whether the Dutch mail<sup>5</sup> be come in. As they lie at the mercy of the first man they meet, and are grave or impertinent all the day long, according to the notions which they have imbibed in the morning, I would earnestly entreat them not to stir out of their chambers till they have read this paper, and do promise them that I will daily instil into them such sound and wholesome sentiments as shall have a good effect on their conversation for the ensuing twelve hours.

But there are none to whom this paper will be more useful than to the female world. I have often thought there has not been sufficient pains taken in finding out proper employments and diversions for the fair ones. Their amusements seem contrived for them, rather as they are women, than as they are reasonable creatures; and are more adapted to the sex than to the species. The toilet<sup>6</sup> is their great scene of business, and the right adjusting of their hair the principal employment of their lives. The sorting of a suit of ribbons is reckoned a very good morning's work; and if they make an excursion to a mercer's or a toyshop,<sup>7</sup> so great a fatigue makes them unfit for anything else all the day after. Their more serious occupations are sewing and embroidery, and their greatest drudgery the preparation of jellies and sweetmeats. This, I say, is the state of ordinary women; though I know there are multitudes of those of a more elevated life and conversation, that move in an exalted sphere of knowledge and virtue, that join all the beauties of the mind to the ornaments of dress, and inspire a kind of awe and respect, as well as love, into their male beholders. I hope to increase the number of these by publishing this daily paper, which I shall always endeavor to make an innocent if not improving entertainment, and by that means at least divert the minds of my female readers from greater trifles. At the same time, as I would fain give some finishing touches to those which are already the most

beautiful pieces in human nature, I shall endeavor to point all those imperfections that are the blemishes, as well as those virtues which are the embellishments, of the sex. In the meanwhile I hope these my gentle readers, who have so much time on their hands, will not grudge throwing away a quarter of an hour in a day on this paper, since they may do it without any hindrance to business.

I know several of my friends and well-wishers are in great pain for me, lest I should not be able to keep up the spirit of a paper which I oblige myself to furnish every day: but to make them easy in this particular, I will promise them faithfully to give it over as soon as I grow dull. This I know will be matter of great raillery to the small wits; who will frequently put me in mind of my promise, desire me to keep my word, assure me that it is high time to give over, with many other little pleasantries of the like nature, which men of a little smart genius cannot forbear throwing out against their best friends, when they have such a handle given them of being witty. But let them remember that I do hereby enter my caveat against this piece of raillery.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Like him whose oars can hardly force his boat against the current, if by chance he relaxes his arms, the boat sweeps him headlong down the stream (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Private rooms, studies.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In *The Advancement of Learning* 2, "To the King." But it was the rod of Aaron, not of Moses, that turned into a devouring serpent (Exodus 7:10–12).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lawyers or students of the law who live or have their offices ("chambers") in the Middle or Inner Temple, one of the Inns of Court.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Bringing the latest war news.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Dressing table.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A shop where baubles and trifles are sold. "Suit of ribbons": a set of ribbons to be worn together. "Mercer": a seller

of such notions as tape, ribbon, and fringe.[Return to reference 7](#)

## STEELE: [Inkle and Yarico]

**The Spectator 11, Tuesday, March 13, 1711**

*Dat veniam corvis, vexat censura columbas.*<sup>1</sup>

—JUVENAL, *Satire* 2.63

Arietta is visited by all persons of both sexes who have any pretence to wit and gallantry. She is in that time of life which is neither affected with the follies of youth or infirmities of age; and her conversation is so mixed with gaiety and prudence that she is agreeable both to the young and the old. Her behavior is very frank without being in the least blamable; as she is out of the tract<sup>2</sup> of any amorous or ambitious pursuits of her own, her visitants entertain her with accounts of themselves very freely, whether they concern their passions or their interests. I made her a visit this afternoon, having been formerly introduced to the honor of her acquaintance by my friend Will Honeycomb, who has prevailed upon her to admit me sometimes into her assembly as a civil, inoffensive man. I found her accompanied with one person only, a commonplace talker who upon my entrance arose and after a very slight civility sat down again; then turning to Arietta pursued his discourse, which I found was upon the old topic of constancy in love. He went on with great facility in repeating what he talks every day of his life; and with the ornaments of insignificant laughs and gestures enforced his arguments by quotations out of plays and songs which allude to the perjuries of the fair and the general levity<sup>3</sup> of women. Methought he strove to shine more than ordinarily in his talkative way that he might insult my silence, and distinguish himself before a woman of Arietta's taste and understanding. She had often an inclination to interrupt him but could find no opportunity, till the larum ceased of



itself; which it did not till he had repeated and murdered the celebrated story of the Ephesian Matron.<sup>4</sup>

Arietta seemed to regard this piece of raillery as an outrage done to her sex, as indeed I have always observed that women, whether out of a nicer regard to their honor or what other reason I cannot tell, are more sensibly touched with those general aspersions which are cast upon their sex than men are by what is said of theirs.

When she had a little recovered her self from the serious anger she was in, she replied in the following manner.

Sir, when I consider how perfectly new all you have said on this subject is, and that the story you have given us is not quite two thousand years old, I cannot but think it a piece of presumption to dispute with you. But your quotations put in me in mind of the fable of the Lion and the Man.<sup>5</sup> The man walking with that noble animal showed him, in the ostentation of human superiority, a sign of a man killing a lion. Upon which the lion said very justly, "We lions are none of us painters, else we could show a hundred men killed by lions, for one lion killed by a man." You men are writers and can represent us women as unbecoming as you please in your works, while we are unable to return the injury. You have twice or thrice observed in your discourse that hypocrisy is the very foundation of our education; and that an ability to dissemble our affections is a professed part of our breeding. These and such other reflections are sprinkled up and down the writings of all ages by authors who leave behind them memorials of their resentment against the scorn of particular women in invectives against the whole sex. Such a writer, I doubt not, was the celebrated Petronius, who invented the pleasant aggravations of the frailty of the Ephesian Lady; but when we consider this question between the sexes, which has been either a point of dispute or raillery ever since there were men and women, let us take facts from plain people, and from such as have not either ambition or capacity to embellish their narrations with any beauties of imagination. I was the other day amusing myself with Ligon's account of Barbados; and in answer to your well-wrought tale, I will

give you (as it dwells upon my memory) out of that honest traveler, in his fifty fifth page, the history of Inkle and Yarico.<sup>6</sup>

Mr. Thomas Inkle of London, aged twenty years, embarked in the Downs<sup>7</sup> on the good ship called the Achilles, bound for the West Indies, on the 16th of June 1647, in order to improve his fortune by trade and merchandise. Our adventurer was the third son of an eminent citizen,<sup>8</sup> who had taken particular care to instill into his mind an early love of gain by making him a perfect master of numbers, and consequently giving him a quick view of loss and advantage, and preventing the natural impulses of his passions by prepossession towards his interests. With a mind thus turned, young Inkle had a person<sup>9</sup> every way agreeable, a ruddy vigor in his countenance, strength in his limbs, with ringlets of fair hair loosely flowing on his shoulders. It happened in the course of the voyage that the Achilles, in some distress, put into a creek on the main<sup>1</sup> of America in search of provisions. The youth, who is the hero of my story, among others went ashore on this occasion. From their first landing they were observed by a party of Indians who hid themselves in the woods for that purpose. The English unadvisedly marched a great distance from the shore into the country, and were intercepted by the natives, who slew the greatest number of them. Our adventurer escaped among others by flying into a forest. Upon his coming into a remote and pathless part of the wood, he threw himself, tired and breathless, on a little hillock, when an Indian maid rushed from a thicket behind him. After the first surprise, they appeared mutually agreeable to each other. If the European was highly charmed with the limbs, features, and wild graces of the naked American, the American was no less taken with the dress, complexion, and shape of an European, covered from head to foot. The Indian grew immediately enamored of him, and consequently solicitous for his preservation. She therefore conveyed him to a cave, where she gave him a delicious repast of fruits, and led him to a stream to slake his thirst. In the midst of these good offices, she would sometimes play with his hair and delight in the opposition of its color to that of her fingers; then open his bosom, then laugh at

him for covering it. She was, it seems, a person of distinction, for she every day came to him in a different dress of the most beautiful shells, bugles and breches.<sup>2</sup> She likewise brought him a great many spoils which her other lovers had presented to her; so that his cave was richly adorned with all the spotted skins of beasts and most parti-colored feathers of fowls which that world afforded. To make his confinement more tolerable, she would carry him in the dusk of the evening or by the favor of moonlight to unfrequented groves and solitudes, and show him where to lie down in safety and sleep amidst the falls of waters and melody of nightingales. Her part was to watch and hold him awake in her arms for fear of her countrymen, and wake him on occasions to consult his safety. In this manner did the lovers pass away their time, till they had learned a language of their own in which the voyager communicated to his mistress how happy he should be to have her in his country, where she should be clothed in such silks as his waistcoat was made of and be carried in houses drawn by horses, without being exposed to wind or weather. All this he promised her the enjoyment of, without such fears and alarms as they were there tormented with. In this tender correspondence these lovers lived for several months, when Yarico, instructed by her lover, discovered a vessel on the coast, to which she made signals, and in the night, with the utmost joy and satisfaction, accompanied him to a ship's crew of his countrymen bound for Barbados. When a vessel from the main arrives in that island, it seems the planters come down to the shore, where there is an immediate market of the Indians and other slaves, as with us of horses and oxen.

To be short, Mr. Thomas Inkle, now coming into English territories, began seriously to reflect upon his loss of time and to weigh with himself how many days' interest of his money he had lost during his stay with Yarico. This thought made the young man very pensive and careful what account he should be able to give his friends<sup>3</sup> of his voyage. Upon which considerations, the prudent and frugal young man sold Yarico to a Barbadian merchant; notwithstanding that the poor girl, to incline him to commiserate her

condition, told him that she was with child by him. But he only made use of that information to rise in his demands upon the purchaser.

I was so touched with this story (which I think should be always a counterpart to the Ephesian Matron) that I left the room with tears in my eyes; which a woman of Arietta's good sense did, I am sure, take for greater applause than any compliments I could make her.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Censure acquits the raven, but pursues the dove (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Course, way of acting.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Frivolity.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A story from Petronius's *Satyricon*, satirizing a supposedly grieving widow who allows a soldier to seduce her and to steal her husband's body. See Haywood's *Fantomina*, p. 659. "Larum": clamor.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Attributed to Aesop, the name under which a body of beast fables from Greek antiquity and later are collected. Compare with Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, line 698.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657), Richard Ligon tells the first version of this story, which was retold throughout the 18th century. Steele invents the names of the lovers and many incidental details.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: An anchorage off the southeast coast of England.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Inhabitant of a city (especially London), often identified as "a man of trade, not a gentleman" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Physical appearance.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Mainland.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Tube-shaped glass beads and braided or interwoven ornaments.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Family members and other connections. [Return to reference 3](#)

## ADDISON: [The Hoop Petticoat]

**The Spectator 127, Thursday, July 26, 1711**

*Quantum est in rebus Inane?*

—PERSIUS, *Satires* 1.1<sup>1</sup>

It is our custom at Sir Roger's, upon the coming in of the post, to sit about a pot of coffee, and hear the old knight read Dyer's *Letter*,<sup>2</sup> which he does with his spectacles upon his nose, and in an audible voice, smiling very often at those little strokes of satire which are so frequent in the writings of that author. I afterwards communicate to the knight such packets as I receive under the quality of<sup>3</sup> Spectator. The following letter chancing to please him more than ordinary, I shall publish it at his request.

Mr. Spectator,

You have diverted the town almost a whole month at the expense of the country;<sup>4</sup> it is now high time that you should give the country their revenge. Since your withdrawing from this place, the fair sex are run into great extravagancies. Their petticoats, which began to heave and swell before you left us, are now blown up into a most enormous concave, and rise every day more and more. In short, Sir, since our women know themselves to be out of the eye of the Spectator, they will be kept within no compass. You praised them a little too soon for the modesty of their head-dresses; for as the humor<sup>5</sup> of a sick person is often driven out of one limb into another, their superfluity of ornaments, instead of being entirely banished, seems only fallen from their heads upon their lower parts. What they have lost in height they make up in breadth, and contrary to all rules of architecture, widen the foundations at the same time that they shorten the superstructure. Were they, like Spanish jennets, to

impregnate by the wind, they could not have thought on a more proper invention.<sup>6</sup> But as we do not yet hear any particular use in this petticoat, or that it contains anything more than what was supposed to be in those of scantier make, we are wonderfully at a loss about it.

The women give out,<sup>7</sup> in defense of these wide bottoms, that they are airy, and very proper for the season; but this I look upon to be only a pretense, and a piece of art,<sup>8</sup> for it is well known we have not had a more moderate summer these many years, so that it is certain the heat they complain of cannot be in the weather. Besides, I would fain ask these tender-constituted ladies, why they should require more cooling than their mothers before them.

I find several speculative persons are of opinion that our sex has of late years been very saucy,<sup>9</sup> and that the hoop petticoat is made use of to keep us at a distance. It is most certain that a woman's honor cannot be better entrenched than after this manner, in circle within circle, amidst such a variety of outworks and lines of circumvallation.<sup>1</sup> A female who is thus invested in whale-bone is sufficiently secured against the approaches of an ill-bred fellow, who might as well think of Sir George Etherege's way of making love in a tub, as in the midst of so many hoops.<sup>2</sup>

Among these various conjectures, there are men of superstitious tempers who look upon the hoop petticoat as a kind of prodigy.<sup>3</sup> Some will have it that it portends the downfall of the French king,<sup>4</sup> and observe that the farthingale appeared in England a little before the ruin of the Spanish monarchy.<sup>5</sup> Others are of opinion that it foretells battle and bloodshed, and believe it of the same prognostication as the tail of a blazing star.<sup>6</sup> For my part, I am apt to think it is a sign that multitudes are coming into the world rather than going out of it.

The first time I saw a lady dressed in one of these petticoats, I could not forbear blaming her in my own thoughts for walking abroad when she was *so near her Time*,<sup>7</sup> but soon recovered myself out of my error, when I found all the modish part of the sex as *far*

*gone* as herself. It is generally thought some crafty women have thus betrayed their companions into hoops, that they might make them accessory to their own concealments, and by that means escape the censure of the world; as wary generals have sometimes dressed two or three dozen of their friends in their own habit, that they might not draw upon themselves any particular attacks of the enemy. The strutting petticoat smooths all distinctions, levels the mother with the daughter, and sets maids and matrons, wives and widows, upon the same bottom.<sup>8</sup> In the meanwhile, I cannot but be troubled to see so many well-shaped, innocent virgins bloated up, and waddling up and down like big-bellied<sup>9</sup> women.

Should this fashion get among the ordinary people, our public ways would be so crowded that we should want street-room. Several congregations of the best fashion find themselves already very much straightened, and if the mode increase I wish it may not drive many ordinary women into meetings and conventicles.<sup>1</sup> Should our sex at the same time take it into their heads to wear trunk breeches<sup>2</sup> (as who knows what their indignation at this female treatment may drive them to) a man and his wife would fill a whole pew.

You know, Sir, it is recorded of Alexander the Great, that in his Indian expedition he buried several suits of armor, which by his direction were made much too big for any of his soldiers, in order to give posterity an extraordinary idea of him, and make them believe he had commanded an army of giants.<sup>3</sup> I am persuaded that if one of the present petticoats happen to be hung up in any repository of curiosities, it will lead into the same error the generations that lie some removes from us; unless we can believe our posterity will think so disrespectfully of their great-grandmothers, that they made themselves monstrous to appear amiable.

When I survey this new-fashioned rotunda<sup>4</sup> in all its parts, I cannot but think of the old philosopher, who after having entered into an Egyptian temple, and looked about for the idol of the place, at length discovered a little black monkey enshrined in the midst of it, upon which he could not forbear crying out (to the great scandal



of the worshippers), "What a magnificent palace is here for such a ridiculous inhabitant!"<sup>5</sup>

Though you have taken a resolution, in one of your papers, to avoid descending to particularities of dress,<sup>6</sup> I believe you will not think it below you, on so extraordinary an occasion, to unhoop the fair sex, and cure this fashionable tympany<sup>7</sup> that is got among them. I am apt to think the petticoat will shrink of its own accord at your first coming to town; at least a touch of your pen will make it contract itself, like the sensitive plant, and by that means oblige several who are either terrified or astonished at this portentous novelty, and among the rest,

*Your humble Servant, &c.*

C.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: How much emptiness is there in things (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: John Dyer (1653/4–1713, not the Welsh poet), a writer of political newsletters that circulated in manuscript, with a country and Tory orientation that would appeal to Sir Roger.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: By the title or in the capacity of. "Packets": letters to the editor; the *Spectator* often published both actual and fictional ones (the following is a fiction of Addison's).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In *Spectator* 106 (Monday, July 2, 1711), Mr. Spectator accepts Sir Roger's invitation to spend a month with him in the country, and during that time, several *Spectator* papers gently satirize country life.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Here, an abnormal state of the bodily fluids believed to determine illness or health. "Modesty of their head-dresses": Addison praises this development in women's fashion in *Spectator* 98 (Friday, June 22, 1711).[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: An old legend tells of mares in Spain becoming pregnant by the wind. "Jennet": a small Spanish horse.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Declare.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Deception, artifice.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Sexually aggressive. "Our sex": here the letter-writer indicates he is a man.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Defensive wall outside a besieged place. "Outworks": fortifications outside the main walls.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Toward the end of *The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub* (1664), the first play by prominent Restoration comic playwright George Etherege (ca. 1636–1692), the ludicrous French servant Dufoy is drugged and trapped in tub by Betty, a chambermaid with whom he had pretended to be in love.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Omen.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The mighty Louis XIV (1638–1715), whose downfall was much anticipated.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In 1557, the Spanish Crown declared the first in a series of nine bankruptcies, extending to the mid-17th century; and in 1558, the joint monarchy of England and Ireland held by Mary I and her husband, Philip II of Spain, ended with Mary's death and the accession of Elizabeth I. "Farthingale": also called the Spanish farthingale (from the Spanish *verdugado*, cane or rod), a whalebone framework for skirts that came into fashion in England in the 1540s and 1550s (worn by Mary, among others).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Comets were thought to portend disasters.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: So near to her pregnancy's coming to term.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Footing (with bawdy pun).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Pregnant.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Clandestine assemblies of Dissenters, unsanctioned by the Church of England. That is, unfashionable women may find themselves so hemmed in (straightened) at legitimate church

services that they will instead attend radical Protestant meetings.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Baggy, full-cut breeches, also called trunk hose, that covered the hips and upper thighs, sometimes shaped with stuffing of wool or other material, worn by men in the 16th and early 17th centuries.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Greek-Roman historian Plutarch (ca. 46–ca. 119 C.E.) tells this story in his “Life of Alexander” included in his series of biographies, *Parallel Lives* (early 2nd century C.E.).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Domed building.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Thoth, Egyptian god of wisdom and writing, was often depicted with the head of a baboon.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Addison did so in *Spectator* 16 (Monday, March 19, 1711).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A swelling; it could refer to a tumor, a pregnancy, or the swellings of pride or conceit.[Return to reference 7](#)

# ADDISON: [The Pleasures of the Imagination]

**The Spectator 411, Saturday, June 21, 1712**

*Avia Pieridum peragro loca, nullius ante  
Trita solo; juvat integros accedere fonts [fonteis];  
Atque haurire:*<sup>1</sup>. . .

—LUCRETIVS, *De Rerum Natura*, 1.926–8

Our sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our senses. It fills the mind with the largest variety of ideas, converses with its objects at the greatest distance, and continues the longest in action without being tired or satiated with its proper enjoyments. The sense of feeling can indeed give us a notion of extension, shape, and all other ideas that enter at the eye, except colors; but at the same time it is very much straitened and confined in its operations, to the number, bulk, and distance of its particular objects. Our sight seems designed to supply all these defects, and may be considered as a more delicate and diffusive kind of touch, that spreads itself over an infinite multitude of bodies, comprehends the largest figures, and brings into our reach some of the most remote parts of the universe.

It is this sense which furnishes the imagination with its ideas; so that by the pleasures of the imagination or fancy (which I shall use promiscuously<sup>2</sup>) I here mean such as arise from visible objects, either when we have them actually in our view or when we call up their ideas into our minds by paintings, statues, descriptions, or any the like occasion. We cannot indeed have a single image in the fancy that did not make its first entrance through the sight; but we have the power of retaining, altering, and compounding those images

which we have once received into all the varieties of picture and vision that are most agreeable to the imagination; for by this faculty a man in a dungeon is capable of entertaining himself with scenes and landscapes more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole compass of nature.

There are few words in the English language which are employed in a more loose and uncircumscribed sense than those of the fancy and the imagination. I therefore thought it necessary to fix and determine the notion of these two words, as I intend to make use of them in the thread of my following speculations, that the reader may conceive rightly what is the subject which I proceed upon. I must therefore desire him to remember that by the pleasures of the imagination I mean only such pleasures as arise originally from sight, and that I divide these pleasures into two kinds: my design being first of all to discourse of those primary pleasures of the imagination which entirely proceed from such objects as are before our eyes; and in the next place to speak of those secondary pleasures of the imagination which flow from the ideas of visible objects when the objects are not actually before the eye, but are called up into our memories, or formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious.

The pleasures of the imagination taken in their full extent are not so gross as those of sense nor so refined as those of the understanding. The last are indeed more preferable, because they are founded on some new knowledge or improvement in the mind of man; yet it must be confessed that those of the imagination are as great and as transporting as the other. A beautiful prospect delights the soul as much as a demonstration; and a description in Homer has charmed more readers than a chapter in Aristotle. Besides, the pleasures of the imagination have this advantage above those of the understanding, that they are more obvious and more easy to be acquired. It is but opening the eye, and the scene enters. The colors paint themselves on the fancy with very little attention of thought or application of mind in the beholder. We are struck, we know not how, with the symmetry of any thing we see, and immediately

assent to the beauty of an object without enquiring into the particular causes and occasions of it.

A man of a polite imagination is let into a great many pleasures that the vulgar<sup>3</sup> are not capable of receiving. He can converse with a picture and find an agreeable companion in a statue. He meets with a secret refreshment in a description, and often feels a greater satisfaction in the prospect of fields and meadows than another does in the possession. It gives him indeed a kind of property in everything he sees, and makes the most rude, uncultivated parts of nature administer to his pleasure; so that he looks upon the world, as it were, in another light, and discovers in it a multitude of charms that conceal themselves from the generality of mankind.

There are indeed but very few who know how to be idle and innocent, or have a relish of any pleasures that are not criminal; every diversion they take is at the expense of some one virtue or another, and their very first step out of business is into vice or folly. A man should endeavor, therefore, to make the sphere of his innocent pleasures as wide as possible, that he may retire into them with safety, and find in them such a satisfaction as a wise man would not blush to take. Of this nature are those of the imagination, which do not require such a bent of thought as is necessary to our more serious employments, nor at the same time suffer the mind to sink into that negligence and remissness which are apt to accompany our more sensual delights, but, like a gentle exercise to the faculties, awaken them from sloth and idleness without putting them upon any labor or difficulty.

We might here add that the pleasures of the fancy are more conducive to health than those of the understanding, which are worked out by dint of thinking and attended with too violent a labor of the brain. Delightful scenes, whether in nature, painting, or poetry, have a kindly influence on the body as well as the mind, and not only serve to clear and brighten the imagination but are able to disperse grief and melancholy, and to set the animal spirits<sup>4</sup> in pleasing and agreeable motions. For this reason Sir Francis Bacon in his Essay upon Health<sup>5</sup> has not thought it improper to prescribe to

his reader a poem or a prospect, where he particularly dissuades him from knotty and subtle disquisitions, and advises him to pursue studies that fill the mind with splendid and illustrious objects, as histories, fables, and contemplations of nature.

I have in this paper, by way of introduction, settled the notion of those pleasures of the imagination which are the subject of my present undertaking, and endeavored by several considerations to recommend to my reader the pursuit of those pleasures. I shall in my next paper examine the several sources from whence these pleasures are derived.<sup>6</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: I wander paths of the Pierides [Muses] not traveled before and joy to be the first to drink at untasted springs (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Without discriminating between them.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The ordinary sort of person. "Polite": cultivated, refined.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Principle of animating bodily energy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Bacon's Essay 30, "Of Regiment of Health," appeared in his *Essays* (1597).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Addison wrote eleven papers on various aspects of the pleasures of the imagination (*Spectator* 411–21), of which this is the first.[Return to reference 6](#)

# THE ARABIAN NIGHTS ENTERTAINMENTS 1706–21

Magic words. Evil sorcerers. Underground palaces. Women turned into dogs. Bargains with genies. An enchanted lamp. A valley full of diamonds and giant snakes. The magical stories collected in *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* captured the British imagination in ways that illuminate the complicated, entangled relations between Britain and the increasingly interconnected world in the eighteenth century.

*The Arabian Nights Entertainments* was massively popular in Britain in the eighteenth century—it went through twenty editions, provoked a slew of competing collections and imitations, and influenced countless writers. Novelist Horace Walpole told a friend that these tales (with “a wildness in them that captivates”) were better than Virgil’s Latin classics: “Read Sinbad the Sailor’s voyages, and you will be sick of Aeneas’s.”

What we know in English today as the *Arabian Nights* can be traced to a fifteenth-century Syrian manuscript in Arabic, *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (“The Thousand and One Nights”)—though this manuscript is itself a collection of older Persian, Indian, and Arabic stories. At the heart of the collection is the brave young woman Scheherazade: the spellbinding storyteller who keeps the murderous Sultan Schahriar fascinated enough to put off, night after night, his plan of



killing her in the morning. Scheherazade's story (which exists in an Arabic fragment from the ninth century) frames all the other stories in the compilation, which are offered as from Scheherazade's mouth.

So the *Arabian Nights* is very old, but, in a way, it is also a distinctive product of an eighteenth-century encounter between European and eastern cultures. The French scholar Antoine Galland became interested in Arabic fiction while he was working with a French ambassador in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul). Galland later acquired the fifteenth-century Syrian manuscript and started translating. He published twelve volumes of *Les Mille et Une Nuits* ("A Thousand and One Nights") in France between 1705 and 1717, and in so doing he remade the old text. He drew material from the Syrian manuscript, but he also included stories from other sources, like the magical adventures of Sinbad the sailor that he found in a different Arabic manuscript. Two of his collection's most famous stories today—"The Story of Aladdin; or, the Wonderful Lamp" and "The Story of Ali Baba," featured here—came from Galland's wide-ranging additions. Galland first heard these two told aloud in 1709 by Syrian storyteller Hanna Diyab, and Galland's versions were the first ever printed. We just do not know what in "Ali Baba" came from an older oral tradition, what from Hanna's performance, and what from Galland's own imagination. Certainly, the story shares magical plot points and criminal characters with stories in the older collection, but its themes also resonate richly with other eighteenth-century French and English fictions: money, greed, curiosity, and individuals trying to rise in the world.

Almost as soon as each of Galland's French volumes appeared, they were translated into English and published in London. Little is known about the anonymous translator. The English edition is often called the "Grub Street" translation, referring to a print marketplace that was characterized by piecework for profit and hack writers. The authorship of the wildly popular *Arabian Nights Entertainments* is thus multiple and complex: countless anonymous Persian, Indian, and Arabic storytellers and scribes stretching back centuries, an identifiable eighteenth-century French scholar and Syrian storyteller,

and an unknown English translator. And the lines of global transmission remained tangled even after the publication: the first printed Arabic-language version of the *Nights* would first appear in early nineteenth-century Calcutta (Kolkata today), where its publication was meant to help officers of the British East India Company learn the language. And the whole story collection is now often described internationally by the title invented by the eighteenth-century English translator: *Arabian* (instead of *A Thousand and One*) *Nights*.

Galland was interested in Persian and Arabic tales almost anthropologically, for what they told him about the cultures they came from, but he also brought his own European biases and fascinations to his translation. Many scholars have found it helpful to understand Galland's version of the tales as part of what theorist Edward Said calls the discourse of "orientalism," a discourse produced by European writers whose vision of "the Orient" (a bunch of different cultures lumped together) was shaped by their own imperial fantasies and fears of cultural difference. In contrast to an emerging "western" self-understanding emphasizing reason, power, and modernity, they dreamed of "eastern" or "oriental" violence, weakness, opulence, and sex. Of course, at this same moment, European countries were inflicting their own violence in eastern colonial sites: Said insists that the binaries were always loaded, ideological, and connected to the pursuit of imperial projects. Also Galland was not *only* projecting, for he was also working closely with manuscripts in a genuine cross-cultural encounter. But the resulting *Arabian Nights* spurred a lively fad in Britain for oriental tales that used exotic locales and fantastic plots as a way of working out anxieties and desires central to Britain's sense of itself and its imperial project. The English oriental tale popularized in the *Nights'* wake was a hybrid form, offering a heady mix of sensual spectacle, mind-bending magic, moral fable, romance adventure, and political satire.

The *Nights* were a key influence on English fiction and the emerging novel in eighteenth-century England. This is fitting, for the

*Nights* themselves stage the power of its fictions to influence. The collection starts with Schahriar's diatribe against women: he is convinced that all women are unchaste and unfaithful, as his first wife had been. But then the brave Scheherazade starts strategically manipulating the sultan's desire for both her body and her stories. The stories she tells sometimes obliquely warn against cruel despotism (like Schahriar's murderous plan), and they often feature remarkable, smart, and resourceful women protagonists—like the brilliant enslaved girl Morgiana who saves Ali Baba multiple times. In the conclusion to the French and English volumes, Scheherazade's stories eventually reform the sultan and protect all the women of his empire. (In some extant Arabic manuscripts, Scheherazade produces not only a thousand and one nights of tales but also, in that time, three children.) The book is fundamentally about the inexhaustible, life-giving, world-shaping power of stories.

# ***From The Arabian Nights Entertainments***<sup>1</sup>

## ***[The Story of Schahriar and Scheherazade]***<sup>2</sup>

Being persuaded that no woman was chaste, [Schahriar] resolved, in order to prevent the disloyalty of such as he should afterwards marry, to wed one every night, and have her strangled next morning. Having imposed this cruel law upon himself, he swore that he would observe it immediately after the departure of the King of Tartary, who speedily took leave of him, and being loaden with magnificent presents set forward on his journey.<sup>3</sup>

Schahzenan being gone, Schahriar ordered his Grand Vizier<sup>4</sup> to bring him the daughter of one of his generals. The Vizier obeyed, the Sultan lay with her, and putting her next morning into his hands again, in order to be strangled, commanded him to get another next night. Whatever reluctancy the Vizier had to put such orders in execution, as he owed blind obedience to the Sultan his master, he was forced to submit. He brought him then the daughter of a subaltern, whom he also cut off the next day. After her he brought a citizen's daughter, and, in a word, there was every day a maid married and a wife murdered.

The rumor of this unparalleled barbarity occasioned a general consternation in the city, where there was nothing but crying and lamentation. Here a father in tears, and unconsolable for the loss of his daughter, and there tender mothers dreading lest theirs should have the same fate, making the air to resound beforehand with their groans. So that instead of the commendations and blessings which the Sultan had hitherto received from his subjects, their mouths were now filled with imprecations against him.

The Grand Vizier, who, as has been already said, was the executioner of this horrid injustice, against his will, had two daughters, the eldest called Scheherazade, and the youngest Dinarzade: the latter was a lady of very great merit, but the elder

had courage, wit, and penetration infinitely above her sex; she had read abundance, and had such a prodigious memory that she never forgot anything. She had successfully applied herself to philosophy, physic,<sup>5</sup> history, and the liberal arts, and for verse exceeded the best poets of her time: besides this, she was a perfect beauty, and all her fine qualifications were crowned by a solid virtue.

The Vizier passionately loved a daughter so worthy of his tender affection; and one day as they were discoursing together, she says to him, "Father, I have one favor to beg of you, and most humbly pray you to grant it me." "I will not refuse it," answers he, "provided it be just and reasonable." "For the justice of it," says she, "there can be no question, and you may judge of it by the motive which obliges me to demand it of you. I have a design to stop the course of that barbarity which the Sultan exercises upon the families of this city. I would dispel those unjust fears which so many mothers have of losing their daughter in such a fatal manner." "Your design, daughter," replies the Vizier, "is very commendable; but the disease you would remedy to me seems incurable; how do you pretend to effect it?" "Father," says Scheherazade, "since by your means the Sultan makes every day a new marriage, I conjure you by the tender affection you bear to me, to procure me the honor of his bed." The Vizier could not hear this without horror. "O Heaven!" replies he in passion, "Have you lost your senses daughter, that you make such a dangerous request to me? You know the Sultan has sworn by his soul, that he will never lie above one night with the same woman, and to order her to be killed next morning, and would you that I should propose you to him? Pray consider well to what your indiscrete zeal will expose you." "Yes, dear father," replies this virtuous daughter, "I know the risk I run, but that does not frighten me. If I perish, my death will be glorious; and if I succeed, I shall do my country an important piece of service." "No, no," says the Vizier, "whatever you can represent to engage me to let you throw yourself into that horrible danger, don't you think that ever I will agree to it. When the Sultan shall order me to strike my poniard<sup>6</sup> into your heart, alas! I must obey him, and what a dismal employment is that

for a father? Ah! if you don't fear death, yet at least be afraid of occasioning me the mortal grief of seeing my hand stained with your blood." "Once more father," says Scheherazade, "grant me the favor I beg." "Your stubbornness," replies the Vizier, "will make me angry, why will you run headlong to your ruin? They that don't foresee the end of a dangerous enterprise, can never bring it to a happy issue."<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \*

"Father," replies Scheherazade, "I beg you would not take it ill that I persist in my opinion. I am nothing moved by the story of that woman.<sup>8</sup> I can tell you abundance of others to persuade you that you ought not to oppose my design. Besides, pardon me for declaring to you, that your opposing me would be in vain; for if your paternal affection should hinder you to grant my request, I would go and offer myself to the Sultan." In short, the father being overcome by the resolution of his daughter, yielded to her importunity, and though he was very much grieved that he could not divert her from such a fatal resolution, he went that minute to acquaint the Sultan, that next night he would bring him Scheherazade.

The Sultan was much surprised at the sacrifice which the Grand Vizier made to him. "How could you resolve upon it," says he, "to bring me your own daughter?" "Sir," answers the Vizier, "it's her own offer. The sad destiny that attends it could not scare her, she prefers the honor of being your Majesty's wife one night to her life." "But don't mistake yourself Vizier," says the Sultan, "tomorrow when I put Scheherazade into your hands, I expect you should take away her life, and if you fail, I swear that you yourself shall die." "Sir," rejoins the Vizier, "my heart without doubt will be full of grief to execute your commands, but it is to no purpose for nature to murmur,<sup>9</sup> though I be her father, I will answer for the fidelity of my hand to obey your order." Schahriar accepted his minister's offer, and told him he might bring his daughter when he pleased.

The Grand Vizier went with the news to Scheherazade, who received it with as much joy as if it had been the most agreeable

thing in the world; she thanked her father for having obliged her in so sensible a manner, and perceiving that he was overwhelmed with grief, she told him, in order to his consolation, that she hoped he would never repent his having married her to the Sultan; but that on the contrary, he should have cause to rejoice in it all his days.

All her business was to put herself in a condition to appear before the Sultan; but before she went, she took her sister Dinarzade apart, and says to her, "My dear sister, I have need of your help in a matter of very great importance, and must pray you not to deny it me. My father is going to carry me to the Sultan to be his wife; don't let this frighten you, but hear me with patience. As soon as I am come to the Sultan, I will pray him to allow you to lie in the bride-chamber, that I may enjoy your company this one night more. If I obtain that favor, as I hope to do, remember to awake me tomorrow, an hour before the day, and to address me in these or some such words. 'My sister, if you be not asleep, I pray you that till daybreak, which will be very speedily, you would tell me one of the fine stories of which you have read so many.' Immediately I will tell you one; and I hope by this means to deliver the city from the consternation they are under at present." Dinarzade answered, that she would obey with pleasure what she required of her.

The time of going to bed being come, the Grand Vizier conducted Scheherazade to the palace, and retired after having introduced her into the Sultan's apartment. As soon as the Sultan was left alone with her, he ordered her to uncover her face, and found it so beautiful, that he was perfectly charmed with her; and perceiving her to be in tears, asked her the reason. "Sir," answered Scheherazade, "I have a sister who loves me tenderly as I do her, and I could wish that she might be allowed to be all night in this chamber, that I might see her, and bid her once more adieu. Will you be pleased to allow me the comfort of giving her this last testimony of my friendship?" Schahriar having consented to it, Dinarzade was sent for, who came with all possible diligence. The Sultan went to bed with Scheherazade upon an alcove raised very high, according

to the custom of the monarchs of the East, and Dinarzade lay in a bed that was prepared for her, near the foot of the alcove.

An hour before day, Dinarzade being awake, failed not to do as her sister ordered her. "My dear sister," cries she, "if you be not asleep, I pray until daybreak, which will be in a very little time, that you will tell me one of those pleasant stories you have read; Alas! this may perhaps be the last time, that ever I shall have that satisfaction."

Scheherazade, instead of answering her sister, addressed herself to the Sultan thus; "Sir, will your Majesty be pleased to allow me to give my sister this satisfaction?" "With all my heart," answers the Sultan. Then Scheherazade bid her sister listen, and afterwards addressing herself to Schahriar, begun thus.<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

As she had spoke those words, perceiving it was day, and knowing that the Sultan rose betimes<sup>2</sup> in the morning to say his prayers and hold his council, Scheherazade held her peace. "Lord, sister," says Dinarzade, "what a wonderful story is this." "The remainder of it," says Scheherazade, "is more surprising, and you will be of my mind, if the Sultan will let me live this day, and permit me to tell it you next night." Schahriar, who had listened to Scheherazade with pleasure, says to himself, "I will stay<sup>3</sup> till tomorrow, for I can at any time put her to death, when she has made an end of the story." So having resolved not to take away Scheherazade's life that day, he rose and went to his prayers, and then called his council.

All this while the Grand Vizier was terrible uneasy. Instead of sleeping, he spent the night in sighs and groans, bewailing the lot of his daughter, of whom he believed that he himself should be the executioner. And as in that melancholy prospect, he was afraid of seeing the Sultan; he was agreeably surprised when he saw the prince enter the council chamber without giving him the fatal orders he expected.



The Sultan, according to his custom, spent the day in regulating his affairs; and when night came, he went to bed with Scheherazade. Next morning before day, Dinarzade failed not to address herself to her sister thus; "My dear sister, if you be not asleep, I pray you, till daybreak, which must be in a very little time, to go on with the story you began last night." The Sultan without staying till Scheherazade asked him leave, bid her make an end of the story of the genie and the merchant, "for I long to hear the issue<sup>4</sup> of it."

## Endnotes

1706

- Note 1: The text is taken from the earliest English versions of *Arabian Nights*. Quotation marks have been added to the dialogue for clarity.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *Arabian Nights Entertainments* opens with the stories of two powerful brothers, Schahriar, the sultan of a vast empire in Persia and the Indies, and Schahzenan, king of Great Tartary (whose capital is in modern-day Uzbekistan). Both men discover that their wives have been unfaithful to them, and both kill their wives. The sexual betrayal leads Schahriar to his plan: he will marry a different woman every night and every morning have that woman killed. This frame story is part of the earliest extant versions of the *Nights* in Arabic.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Schahzenan, the sultan's brother, having come to terms with his own late wife's fidelity, returns home.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The sultan's chief minister.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Medicine.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Dagger.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Vizier then tries to change Scheherazade's mind by telling her two moral fables.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Vizier's second story featured a wife who insists on knowing a secret, which, if told, would cost her husband's life.

Her husband solves the problem brutally by beating her.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: For his natural feelings to resist the task.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Scheherazade starts to tell her first story, about a merchant who accidentally kills a genie's son.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Early.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Wait, refrain from acting.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Outcome.[Return to reference 4](#)

## ***[The Story of Ali Baba, and the Forty Thieves Destroyed by a Slave]<sup>1</sup>***

Most mighty Sultan (said Scheherazade),<sup>2</sup> in a town in Persia, on the confines of your Majesty's dominions, there lived two brothers called Cassim and Ali Baba, who, though they were left equally alike<sup>3</sup> by their father, whose substance was but small, yet they were not alike favorites of fortune.

Cassim married a wife, who soon after their marriage was left heir to a plentiful estate, and rich merchandises, so that he became a rich and considerable merchant and lived at his ease.

Ali Baba, on the other hand, who married a woman as poor as himself, lived very meanly, and was forced to maintain his wife and children by his daily labor, by cutting of wood in a forest hard by the town, and bringing it upon three asses, which were his whole substance,<sup>4</sup> to town to sell.

One day, when Ali Baba was in the forest, and had just cut wood enough to load his asses, he saw at a distance a great cloud of dust, which seemed to approach towards him; he observed it very attentively, and distinguished a large body of horse,<sup>5</sup> and though they did not talk much of thieves in that country, Ali Baba began to think that they might prove so, and without considering what might become of his asses, he was resolved to save one, and to that end climbed up a large, thick and close-leafed tree, from whence he could see all that passed without being seen; and this tree stood at the bottom of a rock which was very high, and so steep and craggy that nobody could climb up it.

This troop, who were all well mounted and well armed, came to the foot of this rock, and there dismounted. Ali Baba counted forty of them, and by their mien and equipment never doubted but that they were thieves, and in his opinion was not mistaken, for they were a troop of banditti<sup>6</sup> who robbed thereabouts, and made that place their rendezvous; and what confirmed him in this opinion was, every man unbridled his horse, and tied him to some shrub or other,

and hung a bag of corn they brought behind them about his neck; then each of them took his portmanteau,<sup>7</sup> which seemed to Ali Baba to be gold and silver by the weight, and followed one who was most likely among them, and whom he took to be their captain, who with his portmanteau too in his hand, came under the tree in which Ali Baba was hid, and traversing among some shrubs, pronounced these words distinctly, "*Sesame*" (which is a sort of corn) "*open.*" As soon as the captain of the robbers had said these words, a door opened, and after he had made all his troop go in, he followed them himself, and the door shut again.

The thieves stayed some time within the rock, and Ali Baba, who feared that someone, or all of them together should come out and catch him, if he should endeavor to make his escape, sat very patiently in the tree; but was nevertheless tempted once or twice to get down and mount one of their horses and lead another, and make all the haste he could to town; but the uncertainty of the event<sup>8</sup> made him choose the safest way.

At last the door opened again, and the forty robbers came out again; as the captain went in last, he came out first, and stood to see them all pass by him, and then Ali Baba heard him bid the door shut by pronouncing these words, "*Shut Sesame.*" Every man went and bridled his horse, fastened his portmanteau, and mounted again; and when the captain saw them all ready, he put himself at their head, and returned the same way he came.

Ali Baba all this time never stirred out of the tree; for, said he to himself, "they may have forgot something, and come back again, and then shall I be taken," but followed them with his eyes as far as he could see them; and after that, stayed some time, before he came down, and remembering the word the captain of the thieves made use of to open and shut, he had the curiosity to try if his pronouncing of it would have the same effect. Accordingly he went among the shrubs, and perceiving the door, he said, "*Open Sesame*"; the door flew wide open.

Ali Baba, who expected a dark dismal place, was very much surprised to see it lightsome and spacious, cut out in the form of a

vault by men, and received the light from an opening at the top of the rock. He saw all sorts of provisions, and rich bales of merchandises, of silk stuffs,<sup>9</sup> brocades, and fine tapestries, piled upon one another, and above all, great heaps of gold and silver, and great bags laid upon one another. This sight made him believe that this cave, by the riches it contained, had been possessed not years but ages, by robbers who succeeded one another.

Ali Baba did not stand long to consider what he should do, but went immediately into the cave, and as soon as he was in, the door shut again, which never disturbed him, because he knew the secret to open it again. He never regarded the silver, but made the best use of his time in carrying out as much of that gold which was in bags, at several times, as he thought his three asses could carry. When he had done, he gathered up his asses, which were dispersed about, and when he had loaded them, covered the bags with green boughs, and pronouncing the words "*Shut Sesame*," made the best of his way to town.

When Ali Baba got home he drove his asses into a little yard, and shut the gates carefully, threw off the wood that covered the bags, carried them into his house, and ranged them in order before his wife, who sat on a sofa.

His wife handled the bags and finding them full of money, suspected that her husband had been robbing, insomuch that when he had brought them all in, she could not help saying, "Ali Baba, have you been so unhappy as to"—"Be quiet wife," interrupted Ali Baba, "do not fright yourself, I am no robber, unless he can be one who steals from thieves. You'll no longer entertain an ill opinion of me, when I shall tell you my good fortune." Then he emptied the bags, which raised such a great heap of gold, as dazzled his wife's eyes; and when he had done, told her the whole adventure from the beginning to the end, and above all recommended it to her to keep secret.

The wife, recovered and cured of her fears, rejoiced with her husband for their good luck, and would count all the gold, piece by piece. "Wife," replied Ali Baba, "you don't know what you undertake,

when you pretend to count the money, you'll never have done; I'll go and dig a hole and bury it, there's no time to be lost." "You are in the right on it, husband," replied the wife, "but let us know as nigh as possible, how much we have; I'll go borrow a small measure<sup>1</sup> in the neighborhood, and measure it while you dig the hole." "What signifies it, wife?" said Ali Baba, "if you would take my advice, you had better let it alone, but be sure to keep the secret, and do what you please."

Away the wife ran to her brother-in-law, Cassim, who lived just by, but was not then at home, and addressing herself to his wife, desired her to lend her a measure for a little while. Her sister-in-law asked her whether she would have a great one or a small one, and being told a small one, bid her stay a little, and she would fetch one.

As the sister-in-law knew very well Ali Baba's poverty, she was curious to know what sort of grain his wife wanted to measure, and bethought herself immediately of putting some suet<sup>2</sup> at the bottom of the measure, and brought it to her with an excuse, that she was sorry that she had made her stay so long, but that she could not find it sooner.

Ali Baba's wife went home, set the measure upon the heap of gold, and filled it and emptied it so often at a small distance upon the floor, and was very well satisfied to find the numbers of measures run so high as they did, and went to tell her husband, who had almost finished the hole he was digging; and while Ali Baba was burying the gold, his wife, to show exactness and respect to her sister-in-law, carried the measure back again, but without taking notice of a piece of gold that stuck at the bottom. "Sister," said she, giving it to her again, "you see that I have not kept your measure long; I am obliged to you for it, and return it with thanks."

As soon as Ali Baba's wife's back was turned, Cassim's wife looked at the bottom of the measure, and was in an inexpressible surprise to find a piece of gold stuck to it. Envy immediately possessed her breast. "What," said she, "has Ali Baba gold so plentiful, as to measure it? Where has that poor wretch got all this gold?" Cassim, her husband, was not at home, as I said before, but

at his shop, which he left always in the evening, which time she thought an age, so great was her impatience to tell him the news.

When Cassim came home, his wife said to him, "Cassim, I warrant you, you think yourself rich, but you are much mistaken; Ali Baba is infinitely much richer than you; he does not count his money, but measures it." Cassim bid her explain the riddle, which she did, by telling him the stratagem she had made use of to make the discovery, and showed him the piece of money, which was so old a coin, that they could not tell in what prince's reign it was coined.

Cassim, instead of being pleased at his brother's prosperity, conceived a mortal jealousy, and could not sleep all that night for it, but went to him in the morning before sunrise. Now Cassim, after he married the rich widow, never treated Ali Baba as a brother, but forgot that name. "Ali Baba," said he, accosting him, "you are very reserved in your affairs; you pretend to be miserably poor, and yet you measure gold." "How brother!" replied Ali Baba; "I don't know what you mean; explain yourself." "Don't pretend ignorance," replied Cassim, showing him the piece of gold his wife had given him, "How many of these pieces," added he, "have you? My wife found this at the bottom of the measure yours borrowed yesterday."

By this discourse, Ali Baba perceived that Cassim and his wife, through his own wife's folly, knew what they had so much reason to keep secret; but what was done could not be recalled; therefore, without showing the least surprise or trouble, he confessed all, and told him by what chance he had discovered this retreat of the thieves, and in what place it was, and offered him part of his treasure to keep the secret. "That's not sufficient," replied Cassim, haughtily, "I'll know exactly where this treasure is, and the signs and tokens, that I may go to it myself, when I have a mind; otherwise I will go and inform against you, and then you will lose all you have got, and I shall have half of what you have for my information."

Ali Baba, more out of his natural good temper than frightened by the insulting menaces of a barbarous brother, told him all he desired, and even the very words he was to make use of to go into the cave, and out again.

Cassim, who wanted no more of Ali Baba, left him soon after, resolving to be before hand with him,<sup>3</sup> and to get all the treasure to himself. He rose early the next morning, and a long time before the sun, and set out with ten mules loaded with great chests, which he designed to fill, purposing to carry many more the next time, according to the riches he found, and followed the road, which Ali Baba had told him: he was not long before he came to the rock, and found out the place by the tree, and other marks his brother had given him. When he came to the door, he pronounced these words, "*Open Sesame*," and it opened, and when he was in, shut again. In examining the cave, he was in a great admiration to find much more riches than he comprehended by Ali Baba's relation. He was so covetous, and desirous of riches, that he could have spent the whole day in feasting his eyes with so much treasure, if the thoughts of carrying some away with him, and loading his mules, had not hindered him. He laid as many bags of gold as he could carry at the door, and coming at last to open the door, his thoughts were so full of the great riches he should possess, that he could not think of the necessary word, but instead of *Sesame*, said, "*Open Barley*," and was very much amazed to find that the door did not open, but remained fast shut: afterwards he named several sorts of grain, but all to no purpose.

Cassim never expected such an accident, and was so frightened at the danger he was in, that the more he endeavored to remember the word *Sesame*, the more his memory was confounded, and he had as much forgot it, as if he had never heard it in his life before, but walked and fretted about the cave, without having the least regard to all the riches that were about him; and in this miserable condition, we will leave him bewailing of his fate, and undeserving of pity.

About midnight the thieves returned to their cave, and at some distance from it, found Cassim's mules straggling about the rock, with great chests and hampers on their backs. This novelty made them very uneasy, and made them gallop in full speed to the cave. The thieves never gave themselves the trouble to pursue the mules



which they drove away, but were more concerned to know who they belonged to. And while some of them searched about the rock, the captain and others went directly to the door with their naked sabers in their hands, and pronouncing the word it opened.

Cassim, who heard the noise of the horses' feet trampling about the cave, never doubted of the coming of the thieves, and his approaching death; but was resolved to make one effort to escape from them. To this end he stood ready at the door, and no sooner heard the word *Sesame*, which he had forgot, and saw the door open, but he jumped briskly out, and threw the captain down, but could not escape the other thieves, who with their sabers soon deprived him of life.

The thieves' first care after this was to go into the cave; they found all the bags which Cassim had brought to the door, to be the more ready to load his mules with, and carried them all back again, without perceiving what Ali Baba had taken away before; then holding a council, and deliberating upon this matter, they guessed that Cassim, when he was in could not get out again; but then could not imagine how he got in. First they thought that he might have got down by the top of the cave; but the opening by which it received light was so high, and the rock so inaccessible without, that they believed it impracticable; and, in short, they none of them could imagine which way he entered; for they were all persuaded, nobody knew their secret: but however it happened, it was a matter of the greatest importance to them to secure their riches; therefore they agreed to cut Cassim's body into four quarters, and to hang two on one side and two on the other, within the door of the cave, to terrify any person, that should attempt the same thing. They had no sooner taken this resolution, but they executed it. And when they had nothing more to detain them, they mounted their horses, and went to beat the roads again, and to attack the caravans they should meet.

In the meantime Cassim's wife was very uneasy; when night came, and her husband was not returned, she ran to Ali Baba in a terrible fright, and said; "I believe, brother-in-law, that you know

that Cassim is gone to the forest, and upon what account; it's now night, and he is not returned; I am afraid some misfortune has come to him." Ali Baba, who never disputed but that his brother, after what he had said to him, would go to the forest, would not go himself that day, for fear of giving him any umbrage; therefore told her, without any reflection upon her husband's unhandsome behavior, that she need not fright herself, for that certainly Cassim did not think it proper to come into the town, till the night should be pretty far advanced.

Cassim's wife, considering how much it concerned her husband to keep this thing secret, was the more easily persuaded to believe him; and went home again, and waited patiently till midnight. Then her fear redoubled with much more sensible grief, because she durst not show it, but was forced to keep it secret from the neighborhood. Then if her fault had been repairable, she repented of her foolish curiosity, and cursed her desire of penetrating into the affairs of her brother and sister. She spent all that night in tears; and as soon as it was day, went to them, telling them, by her tears, the cause of her coming.

Ali Baba never waited for his sister-in-law to desire him to go to see what was become of Cassim, but went immediately with his three asses, begging of her first to moderate her affliction. When he came near the rock, and having seen neither his brother nor his mules in his way, he was very much surprised to see some blood spilt by the door, which he took for an ill omen: but when he had pronounced the word, and the door opened, he was much more startled at the dismal sight of his brother's quarters. He was not long in thinking how he should pay the last dues to his brother, and without remembering the little brotherly friendship he had for him, went into the cave to find something to wrap them in, and loaded one of his asses with them, and covered them over with green wood; the other two asses he loaded with bags of gold, covering them with boughs also; and then bidding the door shut, came away; but was so cautious as to stop some time at the end of the forest, that he might not go into the town before night. When he came

home, he drove the two asses loaded with gold into his little yard, and left the care of unloading them to his wife, while he led the other to his sister-in-law's.

Ali Baba knocked at the door, which was opened by Morgiana, a cunning artful slave, so fruitful in her inventions, that she would succeed in the most difficult undertakings; and Ali Baba knew her to be such. When he came into the court, he unloaded his ass, and taking Morgiana aside, said to her, "The first thing I ask of thee is an inviolable secrecy, which you will find is necessary both for thy mistress's sake and mine. Thy master's body is contained in both those two bundles, and our business is to bury him as if he died a natural death; go, tell your mistress I want to speak with her, and mind what I say to you."

Morgiana went to her mistress, and Ali Baba followed her. "Well, brother," said she with great impatience, "what news do you bring me of my husband? I perceive no comfort in your countenance." "Sister," answered Ali Baba, "I cannot tell you anything, before you hear my story from the beginning to the end, without speaking a word; for it is of as great importance to you, to keep what has happened secret, as to me." "Alas!" said she, "this preamble lets me know, that my husband is dead; but at the same time I know the necessity of the secrecy you require of me, and I must constrain myself; say on, I will hear you."

Then Ali Baba told his sister the success of his journey, till he came to the finding of Cassim's body. "Now," said he, "sister, I have something to tell you, which will afflict you much the more, because it is what you so little expect; but it cannot now be remedied; and if anything can comfort you, I offer to put that little which God has sent me to what you have, and marry you, assuring you, that my wife will not be jealous; and that we shall live happily together.<sup>4</sup> If this proposal is agreeable to you, we must think of acting so, as that my brother should appear to die a natural death; and I think fit to leave the management of it to the care of Morgiana, and will contribute myself all that lies in my power."

What could Cassim's widow do better than accept of this proposal? For though her first husband had left behind him a plentiful substance, this second was much richer, and by the discovery of this treasure might be much more. Instead of rejecting the offer, she looked upon it as a reasonable motive to comfort her, and drying up her tears, and suppressing her sighings and sobbings, showed Ali Baba she approved of his proposition in this matter. Ali Baba left the widow, and also recommending to Morgiana to acquit herself well of what she had undertaken, and returned home with his ass.

Morgiana went out at the same time to an apothecary's, and asked him for a sort of lozenges, which he prepared and were very efficacious in the most dangerous distempers. The apothecary asked her, who was sick, her master? And she replied, with a sigh, her good master Cassim himself; that they knew not what his distemper was; but that he could neither eat nor speak. After these words, Morgiana carried the lozenges home with her, and the next morning went to the same apothecary's again, and with tears in her eyes, asked for an essence, with which they used to rub sick people, when at the last extremity. "Alas!" said she, taking it from the apothecary, "I am afraid that this remedy will have no better effect than the lozenges; and that I shall lose my good master."

On the other hand, as Ali Baba and his wife were often seen to go between Cassim's and their own house all that day, and to seem melancholy, nobody was much surprised in the evening, to hear the lamentable shrieks and cries of Cassim's wife and Morgiana, who told it everywhere that her master was dead.

The next morning, soon after day appeared, Morgiana, who knew a certain old cobbler that opened his stall early, before other people, went to him, and bidding him good morrow, put a piece of gold into his hand. "Well," said Baba Mustapha, which was his name, and who was a merry old fellow, looking on the gold, "this is good handsel;<sup>5</sup> what must I do for it?"

"Baba Mustapha," said Morgiana, "you must take along with you your sewing tackle, and go with me; but I must tell you, we must

blindfold you, when we come to such a place."

Baba Mustapha seemed to boggle a little at these words. "Oh! oh!" replied he, "you would have me to do something against my conscience and honor." "God forbid," said Morgiana, putting another piece of gold into his hand, "that I should ask anything that is contrary to your honor; only come along with me, and fear nothing."

Baba Mustapha went with Morgiana, who after she had bound his eyes, at the place she told him of, with an handkerchief, carried him home with her, and never unloosed his eyes till he came into the room where her master lay. "Baba Mustapha," said she, "you must make haste and sew these quarters together; and when you have done, I'll give you another piece of gold."

After Baba Mustapha had done as she bid him, she blindfolded him again, gave him the gold she promised, recommending secrecy to him, carried him back to the place where she first bound his eyes; pulled off the band, and watched him that he returned to his stall, for fear he should have the curiosity to dog her; and then went home.

By that time Morgiana had done all this, and warmed some water to wash the body, Ali Baba came with perfumes and incense to embalm it, with the usual ceremonies. Not long after the joiner,<sup>6</sup> according to Ali Baba's order, brought the coffin, which Morgiana, that he might perceive nothing, received at the door; and helped Ali Baba to put the body into it; and as soon as he had nailed it up, went to the mosque to tell the imam that they were ready, telling the people of the mosque whose business it was to wash the dead, and who offered to perform their duty, that it was done already.

Morgiana had scarce got home before the imam and the other ministers of the mosque. Four neighbors carried the corpse on their shoulders, and followed the imam, who recited some prayers to the burying ground. Morgiana, as a slave of the deceased, followed the corpse, beating her breast, and tearing her hair; and Ali Baba came after with some neighbors, who walked two and two, and often relieved one another in carrying the corpse.

Cassim's wife, she stayed at home to mourn, and receive visits from her neighbors' wives and acquaintance, who according to the custom, during the time of the ceremony of the burial, came to bewail with the widow for her loss.

In this manner Cassim's horrid murder was concealed, and managed so well by Ali Baba, his wife, Cassim's widow, and Morgiana that nobody had the least knowledge or suspicion of it.

Three or four days afterwards Ali Baba removed his goods to his brother's widow's house; but the money he had taken from the thieves he conveyed thither by night; and soon after the marriage with his sister-in-law (which is common in our religion) was blown about.<sup>2</sup>

As for Cassim's shop, Ali Baba gave it to his eldest son, who had been some time out of his apprenticeship to a great merchant, promising him withal, that if he managed the stock well, he would give him a fortune to marry very advantageously.

Now let us leave Ali Baba to enjoy the beginning of his good fortune, and return to the forty thieves.

They came again, at the appointed time, to visit their retreat, and were in a great surprise to find Cassim's body taken away, and some of their gold; "we are certainly discovered," said the captain, "and shall be undone, if we don't take care, and apply some remedy; otherwise, we shall insensibly lose all the riches, which our ancestors have been so many years amassing together with so much pains and danger. What I think of this loss, which we have sustained, is, that the thief which we surprised had the secret of opening the door, and we came luckily as he was coming out: But his body being removed, and the money which we miss, plainly shows that he has an accomplice; and it is likely that there were but two, who had got this secret, and one we have catched; therefore we must look narrowly after the other. What say you to it, my lads?"

All the thieves approved of and thought the captain's sentiments very just; and agreed that they must lay all other enterprises aside, to follow this closely, and not to depart till they had succeeded.

"I expected no less," said the captain, "from your courage and bravery; but first of all, we must make choice of one who is bold enough to go into the town dressed like a traveler and stranger, to try if he can hear of anyone's being barbarously murdered and massacred, and to endeavor to find out the house where he lived. This is a thing of the first importance for us to know, that we may do nothing we have reason to repent of by discovering of ourselves in a country where we have lived so long unknown, and where we have so much reason to continue: but to prevent our being deceived by anyone who shall take upon himself the charge of this commission, and may come and give us a false report, which may be the cause of our ruin; I ask you all, if you don't think it fit, that in that case, he shall submit to suffer death."

Without waiting for the suffrages<sup>8</sup> of all his companions, one of the thieves started up, and said, "I submit myself to this law, and think it an honor to expose my life by taking such a commission upon me; but remember, if I do not succeed, that at least I neither wanted courage nor good will to serve my troop."

After this robber had received the thanks and commendations of the captain and his comrades, he disguised himself so, that nobody would take him for what he was; and taking his leave of the troop that night, went into the town just at daybreak; and walked up and down till he came to Baba Mustapha's stall, which was always open before any of the shops of the town.

Baba Mustapha was set on his seat, with an awl<sup>9</sup> in his hand, just going to work. The thief saluted him, bidding him good morrow, and perceiving that he was old, he said, "Honest man, you begin to work very early: is it possible, that anyone of your age can see so well? I question, if it was somewhat lighter, whether I could see to stitch."

"Certainly," replied Baba Mustapha, "you must be a stranger, and don't know me; for, as old as I am, I have extraordinary good eyes; and perhaps you will not believe me when I tell you, that I sewed a dead body together in a place, where I had not so much light as I have now."

The thief was overjoyed to think that he had addressed himself at his first coming into the town, to a man who gave him the intelligence he wanted, without asking him. "A dead body!" replied he with amazement, to make him explain himself. "How do you say, stitched up a dead body!" added he, "you mean, you sewed up his winding sheet?"<sup>1</sup> "No, no," answered Baba Mustapha, "I know what I say; you want to have me speak out, but you shall know no more."

The thief wanted no greater an insight to be persuaded, that he had discovered what he came about; he put his hand into his pocket, and pulling out a piece of gold, putting it into Baba Mustapha's hand, said to him, "I don't want to know your secret, though I can assure you I would not divulge it, if you trusted me with it. The only thing, which I desire of you, is to do me the favor to show me the house where you stitched up the dead body."

"If I would do you that favor which you ask of me," replied Baba Mustapha, holding the money in his hand, ready to give him again, "I assure you I cannot do it; and you may believe me for this reason: I was carried to a certain place, where they first blinded me, and then led me to the house, and brought me back again after the same manner; therefore you see the impossibility of doing what you desire."

"Well," replied the thief, "you may remember a little way that you was led blindfolded. Come, let me blind your eyes at the same place, perhaps you may remember some part of the way and turnings; and as everybody ought to be paid for their trouble, there's another piece of gold for you; gratify me in what I ask of you."

The two pieces of gold were great temptations to Baba Mustapha; he looked at them a long time in his hand without saying one word, thinking with himself what he should do; but at last he pulled out his purse and put them in. "I cannot assure you," said he to the thief, "that I can remember the way exactly; but since you desire it, I'll try what I can do." At these words, Baba Mustapha got off his seat, and without shutting up his shop, where he had nothing valuable to lose, he led the thief to the place where Morgiana bound his eyes. "'Twas here," said Baba Mustapha, "where I was



blindfolded, and I turned this way." The thief, who had his handkerchief ready, tied it over his eyes, and walked by him till he stopped. "I think," said Baba Mustapha, "I went no farther than here," and stopped directly at Cassim's house, where Ali Baba lived then; upon which the thief, before he pulled off the band, marked the door with a piece of chalk, which he had ready in his hand; and when he pulled it off, he asked him if he knew whose house that was? To which Baba Mustapha replied, that as he did not live in that neighborhood, he could not tell.

The thief, finding he could discover no more from Baba Mustapha, thanked him for the trouble he had given him, and left him to go back to his stall, while he returned to the forest, persuaded that he should be very well received.

A little after the thief and Baba Mustapha parted, Morgiana went out for something, and coming home again, seeing the mark the thief had made, she stopped to observe it. "What's the meaning of this mark?" said she to herself; "somebody intends my master no good, or else some boy has been playing the rogue; be what it will," added she, "it is good to fence against the worst." Accordingly she went and fetched a piece of chalk, and marked two or three doors on each side theirs, the same, without saying a word to her master.

In the meantime, the thief rejoined his troop again in the forest, and told them the good success he had, expatiating upon his good fortune, in meeting with the only person, so soon, who could inform him of what he wanted to know. All the robbers listened to him with the utmost satisfaction; when the captain commending his diligence, and addressing himself to them all, said, "Comrades, we have no time to lose, let us all go armed, and that we may not give any suspicion, let one or two go privately into the town together, and appoint the rendezvous in the great square; and in the meantime our comrades here and I will go find out the house, and then we will consult what is best to be done."

The speech and method was approved by all, and according to it, they all got into the town without being in the least suspected. The captain and he that was the spy entered the last of all, and when

they came to the street where Ali Baba lived, he showed the captain one of the houses which Morgiana had marked, and said, that was it: but going a little farther to prevent being taken notice of, the captain observed that the next door was chalked in the same manner and place; and showing it to his guide, asked him, which house it was, that or the first? The guide was so confounded, that he knew not what answer to make, and much more, when he and the captain saw five or six houses besides, marked after the same manner. He assured the captain, with an oath, that he had marked but one, and could not tell who had chalked the rest so like that which he marked, and owned in that confusion he could not distinguish it.

The captain, finding that their design proved abortive, went directly to the place of rendezvous, and told the first of his troop that he met, that they had lost all their labor, and must return to their cave the same way as they came; and set them, himself, the example.

When the troop was all got together, the captain told them the reason of their returning; and presently the conductor was declared by all worthy of death; and with courage and resignation to their suffrages kneeled down to receive the stroke from him that was appointed to give it.

But as for the preservation of the troop, so great an injury was not to go unpunished. Another of the gang, who promised himself, that he should succeed better, presented himself, and his offer being accepted, he went and corrupted Baba Mustapha, as the other had done, and being showed the house, marked it in a place more remote from sight with red chalk.

Not long after, Morgiana, whose eyes nothing could escape, went out, and seeing the red chalk, and arguing after the same manner with herself, marked the other neighbors' houses in the same place and manner.

The thief, at his return to his company, valued himself very much upon the precaution he had taken, which he looked upon as an infallible way of distinguishing Ali Baba's house from his neighbors;

and the captain and all of them thought it would do. They conveyed themselves into the town in the same manner as before; and when the thief and his captain came to the street, they found the same difficulty; at which the captain was enraged, and the thief in as great confusion as his predecessor.

Thus the captain and his troop were forced to retire a second time, and much more dissatisfied; and the robber, as the author of the mistake, underwent the same punishment, which he willingly submitted to.

The captain, having by this way lost two brave fellows of his troop, was afraid of diminishing it too much by pursuing it, and found, by their example, that their heads were not so good as their hands on such occasions; and therefore resolved to take upon himself this important commission.

Accordingly he went and addressed himself to Baba Mustapha, who did him the same piece of service he had done to the former. He never amused himself with setting any particular mark on the house, but examined and observed it so carefully, by passing often by it, that it was impossible for him to mistake it.

The captain, very well satisfied with his journey, and informed in what he wanted to know, returned to the forest; and when he came into the cave where the troop waited for him, he said, "Now comrades, there's nothing can prevent our revenge; I am certain of the house, and in my way hither, I have thought how to put it in execution, and if anyone knows a better expedient, let him communicate it." Then he told them his contrivance; and as they approved of it, he ordered them to go into the towns and villages about, and buy nineteen mules and eight and thirty large jars, and fill one of them full of oil.

In two or three days' time, the thieves purchased the mules and jars; and the captain put his whole troop into the jars, all armed, leaving them room to breathe, by making holes under the place where they were tied up at the top, and rubbed the jars on the outside with oil.

Things being thus prepared, the nineteen mules were loaded with seven and thirty thieves, in jars, and the jar of oil; and the captain, as their driver, set out with them, and got to the town by the dusk of the evening, as he intended. He led them through the streets till he came to Ali Baba's, at whose door he designed to have knocked, but was prevented by his sitting there, after supper, to take a little fresh air. However, he stopped his mules, and addressed himself to him, and said, "I have brought some oil here a great way to sell at tomorrow's market, and it is now so late that I do not know where to lodge; if I should not be troublesome to you, do me the favor to let me lie with you, and I shall be very much obliged to you."

Though Ali Baba had seen the captain of thieves, and had heard him speak, yet it was impossible for him to know him in the disguise of an oil merchant. He told him he should be welcome, and immediately opened his gates for the mules to go into the yard. At the same time he called to a slave he had, and not only ordered him, when the mules were unloaded, to put them into the stable, but to give them corn and hay; and then went to Morgiana to bid her get a good hot supper for his guest; and make him a good bed.

When the captain had unloaded his mules, and led them into the stable, and was looking for a place to lie in all night, Ali Baba went to him, and desired him to walk into the hall, telling him, he would not by any means suffer him to lie in the yard all night. The captain excused himself very much, upon account of being troublesome, the better to disguise the matter, and at last, with much importunity, and with an inward satisfaction consented. Ali Baba not only bore him company, but entertained him with a great many things to divert him; and when he had supped, told him, in taking his leave for that night, he might be free, and call for what he wanted.

The captain rose up at the same time, and went with him to the door; and while Ali Baba went into the kitchen to speak to Morgiana, he went into the yard, under a pretext of looking at his mules. Ali Baba, after charging Morgiana afresh to take care of his guest, said to her, "tomorrow morning I design to go to the bath before day,

take care of my bathing-linen, be ready, and give them to Abdalla," which was the slave's name; "and make me some broth against I come back"; after this he went to bed.

In the meantime, the captain of the thieves went into the yard to give his people orders what to do; and beginning at the first jar, and so on to the last, said, "as soon as I throw some stones out of the chamber window, where I lie, do not fail to cut the jar open with the knife you have about you, and come out, and I'll be presently with you." After this he returned into the kitchen, and Morgiana taking up a light, conducted him to his chamber, where, after she had asked him if he wanted anything, she left him; and he, to avoid any suspicion, put the light out soon after, and laid himself down in his clothes, that he might be the more ready to rise again.

Morgiana, remembering Ali Baba's orders, got his bathing-linen ready, and ordered Abdalla, who was not then gone to bed, to set on the pot for the broth; but while she scummed the pot, the lamp went out, and there were no candles, nor no more oil in the house, and what to do she did not know, for the broth must be made; when Abdalla, seeing her very uneasy, said, "don't fret and tease yourself, but go into the yard, and take some oil out of some of the jars."

Morgiana thanked Abdalla for his advice, and while he went to bed, that he might be the better able to rise to follow Ali Baba to the bath, she took the oil pot, and went into the yard, and as she came nigh the first jar, the thief within it said softly, "Is it time?"

Any other slave but Morgiana, to be so surprised, as she was to find a man in the jar instead of the oil she wanted, would have made so great a noise, and given an alarm, attended with ill consequences; whereas Morgiana apprehending immediately the importance of keeping the secret, and the danger she, Ali Baba, and his family were in, and the necessity of applying a speedy remedy without noise, conceived at once the means, and without showing the least concern answered, "Not yet, but presently"; and went in this manner to all the jars, giving the same answer, till she came to the jar of oil.

By this means, Morgiana found that her master Ali Baba, who thought that he had entertained an oil merchant, had admitted eight and thirty thieves into his house; looking on the pretended merchant as their captain, she made what haste she could to fill her oil-pot, and returned into the kitchen, where, as soon as she had lighted her lamp, she took a great kettle, and went again to the oil jar, filled it full, and set it on the fire to boil; and as soon as it boiled, went and poured enough into every jar to stifle and destroy the thief within.

When this action, worthy the courage of Morgiana, was executed, without any noise, as she had projected, she returned into the kitchen and shut the door, and having put out the great fire she had made to boil the oil, and leaving just enough to make the broth, put out also the lamp, and remained hushed, resolving not to go to bed, till she had observed what was to follow.

She had not waited above a quarter of an hour, before the captain of the thieves waked, got up, and opened the window, and finding no light, and hearing no noise, or anyone stirring in the house, gave the signal, by throwing stones at the copper jars, never disputing but that they would hear the sound they gave. Then he listened, and hearing nor perceiving nothing whereby he could judge that his companions stirred, he began to grow very uneasy, and threw again a second and third time, and could not comprehend the reason that none of them should answer to his signal; cruelly alarmed, he went softly down into the yard, and going to the first jar, and asking the thief whom he thought alive, if he was asleep? he smelled the hot boiled oil, which sent forth a steam out of the jar, and knew thereby that his plot was discovered; and examining all the jars, found that all his gang were dead; and by the oil he missed out of the last jar, he guessed at the means and manner of their deaths. Enraged and in despair for having failed in his design, and to lose so many jolly companions, he forced the lock of a door that led from the yard to the garden; and climbing over the walls of several gardens at last made his escape.

When Morgiana heard no noise, nor sound, after waiting some time, that the captain did not return, she guessed that he chose

rather to make his escape by the gardens than by the street door, which was double locked, satisfied and pleased to have succeeded so well, and secured the house, she went to bed.

Ali Baba rose before day, and followed by his slave, went to the baths, entirely ignorant of the amazing accident that had happened at home; for Morgiana was in the right not to wake him before, for fear of losing the opportunity, and afterwards she thought it needless to disturb him.

When he returned from the baths and the sun was risen, he was very much surprised to see the oil jars, and that the merchant was not gone with the mules, and asked Morgiana, who opened the door, and let all things stand as they were, the reason of it. "My good master," answered she, "(God preserve you and your family), you will be better informed of what you desire to know, when you have seen what I have to show you, if you will give yourself the trouble to follow me."

As soon as Morgiana had shut the door, Ali Baba followed her, and when she brought him into the yard, she bid him look into the first jar, and see if there was any oil; Ali Baba accordingly did so, and seeing a man, started backward, almost frightened out of his wits, and cried out. "Do not be afraid," said Morgiana, "the man you see there can neither do you nor anybody else any harm, he is dead." "Ah! Morgiana," said Ali Baba, "what is it you show me? Explain the meaning of it to me." "Moderate your astonishment, and do not excite the curiosity of your neighbors," replied Morgiana, "and I will; for it is of great importance to keep this affair secret. Look in all the other jars."

Ali Baba examined in all the jars one after another, and when he came to that which had the oil in it, he found it prodigiously sunk, and stood for some time motionless, sometimes looking on the jars, and sometimes on Morgiana, without saying a word, so great was his surprise; at last, when he had recovered himself, he said, "And what's become of the merchant?"

"Merchant!" answered she, "he's as much one as I am; I'll tell you who he is, and what is become of him: but you had better hear

the story in your own chamber; for it is time that you had your broth after your bathing."

While Ali Baba went into his chamber, Morgiana went into the kitchen to fetch the broth, and carry it to him; but before he would drink it, he first bid her satisfy his impatience, and tell him the story with all the circumstances; and she obeyed him.

"Last night, sir," said she, "when you was gone to bed, I got your bathing-linen ready, and gave them to Abdalla; afterwards I set on the pot for the broth, and as I was skimming the pot, the lamp, for want of oil, went out; and as there was not a drop more in the house, I looked for a candle, but could not find one; Abdalla seeing me vexed put me in mind of the jars of oil which stood in the yard. I took the oil pot, and went directly to the jar, which stood nearest to me, and when I came to it, I heard a voice within it say, 'Is it time?' I answered, without being dismayed, and comprehending immediately the malicious intention of the pretended oil merchant, 'Not yet, but presently.' Then I went to the next, and another voice asked me the same question, and I returned the same answer; and so on, till I came to the last, which I found full of oil, with which I filled my pot."

"When I considered, that there were seven and thirty thieves in your yard, who only waited for a signal to be given by the captain, whom you took to be an oil merchant, and entertained so handsomely, I thought there was no time to be lost; I carried my pot of oil into the kitchen, lighted the lamp, and afterwards took the biggest kettle I had, went and filled it full of oil, and set it on the fire to boil, and then went and poured as much into each jar, as was sufficient to prevent them from executing the pernicious design they came about: after this I retired into the kitchen, and put out the lamp, but fore I went to bed, I waited at the window to know what measures the pretended merchant would take."

"After I had watched some time for the signal, he threw some stones against the jars, out of the window, and neither hearing or perceiving anybody stirring after throwing three times, he came down, and I saw him go to every jar; after which, through the



darkness of the night, I lost sight of him. I waited some time longer, and finding that he did not return, I never doubted, but that seeing he had missed his aim, he had made his escape over the walls of the gardens."

"This," said Morgiana, "is the account you asked of me, and I am convinced it is the consequence of an observation, which I had made for two or three days before, but did not think fit to acquaint you with; for when I came in one morning early, I found our street door marked with white chalk, and the next morning with red, and both times without knowing what was the intention of those chinks: I marked two or three neighbors' doors on each hand after the same manner. If you reflect on this, and what has since happened, you'll find it to be a plot of the thieves of the forest, of whose gang there are two wanting, and now they are reduced to three: All this shows, that they had sworn your destruction, and it's proper you should stand upon your guard while there's one of them alive: for my part, I shall not neglect anything necessary to your preservation, which I am in duty obliged to regard."

When Morgiana had left off speaking, Ali Baba was so sensible of the great service she had done him that he said to her, "I will not die without rewarding you as you deserve; I owe my life to thee, and for the first token of my acknowledgement, I give thee thy liberty from this moment. I am persuaded with thee, that the forty thieves have laid all manner of snares for me. God, by thy means, has delivered me from them, and I hope will continue to preserve me from their wicked designs, and by averting the danger which threatened me, will deliver the world from their persecution, and of that cursed race of people: all that we have to do is to bury them immediately, and with all the secrecy imaginable; but that Abdalla and I will undertake."

Ali Baba's garden was very long, and shaded at the farther end by a great number of trees; thither he and the slave went, and dug a trench long and wide enough to hold all the thieves, and were not long doing it by reason the earth was light. Afterwards they took the bodies out of the jars, pulled off their arms,<sup>2</sup> and carried them to the

end of the garden, and filled up the trench again. When this was done, Ali Baba hid the jars; and for the mules, as he had no occasion for them, he sent them at different times to be sold.

While Ali Baba took these measures to prevent the world knowing how he came by his riches in so short a time, the captain of the thieves returned to the forest in a most inconceivable mortification; and in the agitation, or rather confusion, he was in at his ill success, which proved so much the contrary to what he promised himself, he entered the cave, not being able all the way from the town to come to any resolution what to do to Ali Baba.

The loneliness of the place seemed frightful to him. "Where are you, my brave lads," cried he, "my old companions? What can I do without you? How unhappy am I to lose you by so fatal and so base a fate, and so unworthy your courage; had you died with your sabers in your hands, like brave men as you were, my regret had been less. When shall I get so gallant a troop again? And if I would, can I undertake it without exposing so much gold and treasure to him who hath already enriched himself out of it? I cannot, nor ought not to think of it, before I have taken away his life. Well, I will undertake that myself, which I could not accomplish with so powerful assistance, and when I have taken care to secure this treasure from being pillaged, I'll provide for it new masters and successors, who shall preserve and augment it to all posterity." This resolution being taken, he was not in the least embarrassed how to execute it; but easy in his mind and full of hopes, slept all that night very quietly.

When he waked the next morning, which was pretty early, he dressed himself as he had proposed, very agreeable to the project he had in his head, and went to the town, and took a lodging in a *khan*, or inn: and as he expected what had happened at Ali Baba's might make a great noise in the town, he asked his host, by way of discourse, what news there was in the city? Upon which the innkeeper told him a great many things, which did not concern him in the least. He judged by this, that the reason why Ali Baba kept this affair so secret was for fear people should know where the

treasure lay, and the means of coming to it; upon which account he sought his life: and this urged him the more to neglect nothing to rid himself of so dangerous a person, and by as secret a way.

The next thing that the captain had to do was to convey a great many sorts of rich stuffs and fine linen to his lodgings, which he did by a great many journeys to the forest on a horse's back, but with all the necessary precautions imaginable, and to dispose the merchandizes, when he had amassed them together, he took a shop, which happened to be opposite to that which was Cassim's, which Ali Baba's son traded in.

He took upon him the name of Cogia Houssain, and as a newcomer, was according to custom extremely civil and complaisant to all his neighbors: and as Ali Baba's son was young and handsome, and a man of good sense, and was often obliged to discourse with him; he strove to cultivate much firmer and stronger, when after two or three days he understood whose son he was. To serve his ends, he caressed him after the most engaging manner, made him some small presents, and often asked him to dine and sup with him; and then treated him very handsomely.

Ali Baba's son did not care to lie under such obligations without making the like return; but was so much straitened for want of room in his lodging, that he could not entertain him so well as he could have wished, therefore acquainted his father, Ali Baba, with his thoughts, and told him, that it did not look well for him to receive such favors from Cogia Houssain without inviting him again.

Ali Baba took care of the treat himself, with a great deal of pleasure. "Son," said he, "tomorrow's Friday, which is a day that the shops are shut up, get him to take a walk with you after dinner, and as you come back, pass by my door and call in, it will look better to have it happen accidentally, than if you gave him a formal invitation. I'll go order Morgiana to provide a supper."

The next day after dinner, Ali Baba's son and Cogia Hussain walked out, and as they returned, Ali Baba's son led Cogia Houssain through the street where his father lived, and when they came to the house, he stopped and knocked at the door. "This, sir," said he,

"is my father's house, who upon the account I have given him of your friendship, charged me to procure him the honor of your acquaintance; and I desire to add this one favor more to those I am already indebted to you."

Though it was the sole aim of Cogia Houssain to introduce himself into Ali Baba's house, that he might kill him without making any noise and hazarding his own life, yet he excused himself and offered to take his leave; but a slave having opened the door, Ali Baba's son took him obligingly by the hand, and in a manner forced him in.

Ali Baba received Cogia Houssain with a smiling countenance, and in the most obliging manner he could wish for: he thanked him for all the favors he had done his son, adding withal, that he was the more obliged to him, because his son was a young man, who could not very well know the world, and might profit by his example.

Cogia Houssain returned the compliment by assuring Ali Baba that, though his son might not have the experience of older men, he had so much good sense as stood him in stead thereof: and after a little more conversation on different subjects, offered again to take his leave, when Ali Baba stopping him, said, "Where are you going, sir, in so much haste; I beg you would do me the honor to take a supper with me, though what I have to give you is not worth your acceptance; but such as it is, you are heartily welcome to." "Sir," replied Cogia Houssain, "I am thoroughly persuaded of your goodwill, and if I ask the favor of you, not to take it ill that I do not accept of your obliging invitation; I beg of you to believe that it does not proceed from any slight, or intention of affront, but from a certain reason, which you would approve of, if you knew it."

"And what may that reason be, sir," replied Ali Baba, "if I may be so bold as to ask you?" "It is," answered Cogia Houssain, "that I can eat no victuals that has any salt in them;<sup>3</sup> therefore judge how I should look at your table." "If that's the only reason," said Ali Baba, "it ought not to deprive me of the honor of your company at supper: for in the first place, there's no salt ever put into my bread, and for the meat we shall have tonight, I promise you, there shall be none:

I'll go and take care of that; therefore you must do me the favor to stay; I'll come again immediately."

Ali Baba went into the kitchen, and ordered Morgiana to put no salt to the meat that was to be dressed that night; and besides to make two or three ragouts, but be sure to put no salt in them.

Morgiana, who was always ready to obey her master, could not help this time seeming somewhat dissatisfied at his new order. "Who is this difficult man," said she, "who eats no salt with his meat? Your supper will be spoiled, if I keep it back so long." "Don't be angry Morgiana," replied Ali Baba, "he is an honest man, therefore do as I bid you."

Morgiana obeyed, though with some reluctance, and had a great curiosity to see this man who eat no salt: to this end, when she had done what he had to do in the kitchen, and Abdalla had laid the cloth, she helped to carry up the plates, and looking at Cogia Houssain, knew him at the first sight to be a captain of the thieves, notwithstanding his disguise; and examining him over carefully, perceived that he had a dagger hid under his garment. "I am not in the least amazed," said she to herself, "that this wicked wretch, who is my master's greatest enemy, would eat no salt with him, since he intends to assassinate him; but I will prevent him."

When Morgiana had sent up the supper by Abdalla, while they were eating, she made the necessary preparations for executing one of the boldest acts which could be thought on, and had just done when Abdalla came again for the dessert of fruit, which she carried up, and as soon as Abdalla had taken the meat away, set it upon the table; after that she set a little table and three glasses by Ali Baba, and going out took Abdalla along with her to go sup together, and to give Ali Baba the more liberty of conversation with his guest.

Then the pretended Cogia Houssain, or rather captain of the thieves, thought he had a favorable opportunity to kill Ali Baba. "I will," said he to himself, "make the father and son both drunk, and then the son, whose life I intend to spare, will not be able to prevent my stabbing his father to the heart; and while the slaves are at

supper, or asleep in the kitchen, I can make my escape over the gardens, as before."

Instead of going to supper, Morgiana, who penetrated into the intentions of the counterfeit, Cogia Houssain, would not give him leave to put his villainous design in execution, but dressed herself like a dancer, girded her waist with a silver gilt girdle, to which there hung a poniard of the same metal, and put a handsome mask on her face. When she had thus disguised herself, she said to Abdalla, "take this tabor<sup>4</sup> and let us go and divert our master and his guest, as we are wont to do of a night when he is alone."

Abdalla took his tabor and played before Morgiana all the way into the hall, who, when she came to the door, made a low curtsy, by way of asking leave to show what she could do; and Abdalla, seeing that his master had a mind to say something, left off playing. "Come in Morgiana," said Ali Baba, "and let Cogia Houssain see what you can do, that he may tell us what he thinks of you: but sir," said he, turning towards Cogia Houssain, "don't think that I put myself to any expense to give you this diversion, since these are my slaves and my cook; and I hope you will not find the entertainment they shall give us disagreeable."

Cogia Houssain, who did not expect this diversion after supper, began to fear that he should not have the opportunity that he designed to have made use of, but hoped if he missed it now to have it another time, by keeping up a friendly correspondence; therefore, though he could have wished Ali Baba would have let it alone, he pretended to be obliged to him for it, and had the complaisance to express a pleasure which he could willingly have dispensed with.

As soon as Abdalla saw that Ali Baba and Cogia Houssain had done talking, he began to play on his tabor, and accompanied it with an excellent air, to which Morgiana, who was an excellent dancer, danced after such a manner, as would have created admiration in any other but Cogia Houssain, who was more attentive to his own designs.

After she had danced several dances with a great deal of justness, she drew the poniard, and holding it in her hand, danced a dance, which was very surprising for the many different figures and fine movements it required. Sometimes she presented the poniard to one's breast, and sometimes to another's, and oftentimes seemed to strike her own. At last, when she was just out of breath, she snatched the tabor from Abdalla with her left hand, and holding the dagger in her right, presented the side where there was a chink, after the manner of those who get their livelihoods by dancing, to try to liberality<sup>5</sup> of her spectators.

Ali Baba put a piece of gold into the tabor, as did also his son, and Cogia Houssain seeing that she was coming to him had pulled out his purse to make her a present too; but while he was putting his hand into it, Morgiana, with a courage and resolution worthy of herself, plunged the poniard into his heart.

Ali Baba and his son were very much frightened at this action. "Ah! Unhappy wretch," cried Ali Baba, "what hast thou done to ruin me and my family?" "'Twas to preserve you and not to ruin you," answered Morgiana; "for see here," said she (opening Cogia Houssain's garment, and showing the dagger), "what an enemy you had entertained; look well at him, and you'll find him to be both the pretended oil merchant, and the captain of the gang of forty thieves. Remember too that he would eat no salt with you, and what would you have more to inform you of his wicked design? Before I saw him, I suspected him, when you told me you had such a guest; and when I saw him, found that my suspicion was not groundless."

Ali Baba, who was immediately sensible of the new obligation he had to Morgiana, for saving his life a second time, embraced her. "Morgiana," said he, "I gave thee thy liberty, and then promised thee that my acknowledgement should not stop there, but that I would express it much farther, and now I'll give proof of it by making thee my daughter-in-law." Then addressing himself to his son, he said to him, "I believe you, son, to be so dutiful a child, that you will not refuse Morgiana for to be your wife. You see that Cogia Houssain sought your friendship with a treacherous design to take away my

life; and if he had succeeded, there's no dispute but he would have sacrificed you to his revenge. Consider that by marrying Morgiana, you marry the support of my family and your own."

The son, far from showing any dislike, readily consented to the marriage; not only because he would not disobey his father, but that his inclination prompted him to it.

After this, they thought of burying the captain of the thieves with his comrades, and did it so privately, that nobody knew anything of it, till a great many years after, when not any one had any concern in the publication of this remarkable history.

A few days afterwards, Ali Baba celebrated the nuptials of his son and Morgiana, with great solemnity, and was very glad to see that his friends and neighbors, whom he invited, had no knowledge of the true motives of that marriage; but that those persons, who were not unacquainted with Morgiana's good qualities, should commend his generosity.

Ali Baba forbore a long time after this marriage from going again to the thieves' cave, from the time he brought his brother Cassim and some bags of gold on three asses, for fear of being surprised by the other two thieves whom he could give no account of, but supposed to be alive.

But at the year's end, when he found they had not made any attempt to disturb him, he had a great inclination to make another journey, taking the most necessary precautions for his safety: accordingly he mounted his horse, and when he came to the cave, and saw no footsteps of neither man nor horse, he looked upon it as a good sign; he alighted off his horse, and tied him to a tree, and presenting himself before the door, pronouncing these words, "*Open Sesame,*" the door opened, he went in, and by the condition he found things in, he judged that nobody had ever been there since the false Cogia Houssain, when he fetched the goods for his shop, and that the gang of forty thieves was quite destroyed, and never disputed but that he was the only person in the world who had the secret of going into the cave, and that all the treasure was solely at his disposal; and having brought a valise<sup>6</sup> along with him, he put as



much gold into it as his horse would carry; and then returned to town.

Afterwards Ali Baba carried his son to the cave, taught him the secret, which they handed down to their posterity; and using this good fortune with moderation, lived in great honor and splendor, serving the greatest offices of the city.

Here the Sultanness Scheherazade ended her story, but perceiving that it was not yet day, began to tell the Sultan Schahriar that which follows. . . .

## Endnotes

- Note 1: "The Story of Ali Baba" does not appear in any older Arabic versions of the *Arabian Nights*. Galland heard it in 1709 from a Syrian storyteller he called Hanna and just added it to his translation's eleventh volume. It first appeared in French in 1717 and in English in 1721–22. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Scheherazade tells the story, though readers are only reminded of her narration at its very beginning and end. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Given an equal inheritance. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Wealth, means of subsistence. "Meanly": in impoverished circumstances. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Large group of men on horseback. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Synonym for thieves. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A case for carrying things while on horseback. "Corn": grain. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Outcome. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Fabrics. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A scale. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Animal fat, used here because it is sticky. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: To act early, to anticipate Ali Baba's actions. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Polygamy was practiced in early modern Muslim cultures in a limited way, with restrictions. Later English orientalist writers overemphasized a practice they found titillating.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The first money he received that day, treated as a sign of luck.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The craftsman who made the wooden coffin.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Widely reported.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Opinions or votes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A tool used to make shoes.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The sheet wrapped around a body for burial.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Armor, weapons.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cultural customs of hospitality treated sharing salt as a sign of loyalty and trust.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A kind of drum.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ascertain the generosity of. "Chink": small hole.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A bag or case for traveling.[Return to reference 6](#)

## **[*The Conclusion to the Story of Schahriar and Scheherazade*]<sup>1</sup>**

The Sultan of the Indies could not but admire of the prodigious memory of the Sultaness his wife, who had entertained and diverted him so many nights with such new and agreeable stories, that he believed her stock was inexhaustible.

A thousand and one nights had passed away in these agreeable and innocent amusements, which contributed so much towards removing the Sultan's fatal prejudice against all women, and sweetening the violence of his temper, that he conceived a great esteem for the Sultaness Scheherazade, and was convinced of her merit and great wisdom, and remembered with what courage she exposed herself voluntarily to be his wife, knowing the fatal destiny of the many Sultanesses before her.

These considerations, and the many rare qualities he knew her to be mistress of, induced him at last to forgive her. "I see lovely Scheherazade," said he, "that you can never be at a loss for these sort of stories to divert me; therefore I renounce, in your favor, the cruel law I had imposed on myself; and I will have you to be looked upon as the deliverer of the many damsels I had resolved to have sacrificed to my unjust resentment."

The Sultaness cast herself at his feet, and embraced them with the marks of a most lively and sincere acknowledgement.

The Grand Vizier was the first that learned this agreeable news from the Sultan's own mouth, which was presently carried to all the towns and provinces; and gained the Sultan and the lovely Scheherazade the blessings of all the people of the large empire of the Indies.

## **Endnotes**

1721–22

- Note 1: The Syrian manuscript Galland translated from did not include the *Nights'* conclusion. This version of a conclusion

appeared in Galland's twelfth volume, in French in 1717 and in English in 1721–22.[Return to reference 1](#)

# Global Commerce and Empire

Over the years this volume covers, 1660 to 1785, Britain built an empire. Or, rather, it extended its imperial power into new territories, lost some (what became the United States of America), but acquired yet more. It was over this very stretch of years that Britain's various territorial holdings, settlements, trade relations, colonial subjects, and naval and martial activities increasingly came to be talked about as part of one imperial project. At the beginning of the period, in 1660, England exerted varying levels of control across the British Isles (in Wales and Ireland), had established colonies along the eastern seaboard of North America and in the Caribbean, and was active in trade in India and Africa. By 1773, Sir George Macartney—who had acted as diplomat in Russia and China and colonial official in Ireland, India, and the Caribbean—could write of “this vast empire on which the sun never sets and whose bounds nature has not yet ascertained.”

Macartney's dream of empire as one “vast” thing, however, obscures how differently British power worked in different geographical and political contexts—in, say, the places we now call Canada, Ghana, Jamaica, India, and Tahiti. British settlers who moved to North America built new lives there, often violently displacing the Indigenous people who preceded them. By contrast, officials of the British East India Company spent stretches of time in South Asia but then returned to Britain with wealth they had extracted from the Indian people, who remained the majority of the population in India. British explorers, just learning about islands in the Pacific, brazenly planted flags to claim possession and left again (with major consequences for the island populations first encountering British people, ships, weapons, and diseases). While Africa—and enslavement—were crucial to Britain's imperial economy, for most of this period British traders operated from forts and small settlements on the coast (though in the later eighteenth century

more African people in Africa would come under British rule in colonies established in Senegambia and Sierra Leone). Consistently, military force and war were crucial to Britain's success in gaining and maintaining its empire, though the nature of this military force also varied geographically. France, the Dutch Republic, Spain, and Portugal were also fighting for empires in this period, and Britain confronted these European rivals on land and at sea, all over the world. The British Navy used its military might to protect and gain trade routes. On the other hand, the East India Company, with a few British officials, hired an army of local Indian soldiers like Dean Mahomet (see [p. 357](#)) to help consolidate its land holdings in India. Registering some of these differences, statesman Edmund Burke described the empire as "vast" but also "infinitely diversified."

It's no accident that "vastness" recurs: eighteenth-century people were struck at the ways Britain was connected to far-flung places. Sometimes, in a celebratory mode, they imagined theirs to be "an empire of the seas," of rivers and oceans linked to all other global waterways. "Rule, Britannia, rule the waves," James Thomson wrote in his patriotic anthem (see [p. 334](#)), and Alexander Pope dreamed that the "Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind," "seas" actually "join[ing] the regions they divide" (see [p. 328](#)). Like oceans, commerce also connected the world. Joseph Addison offered an optimistic celebration of this: to him, God seemed to have designed the world in order to encourage international trade, spreading different desirable products around geographically so that "the natives of the several parts of the globe" would "have a kind of dependence upon one another, and be united together by a common interest" (see [p. 325](#)). Ignatius Sancho, a formerly enslaved Black man, saw Britain's participation in the networks of global trade differently, as uniting different places through a single bad motive: "I must observe your country's conduct has been uniformly wicked in the East—West Indies—and even on the coast of Guinea—The grand object of English navigators . . . is money—money—money" (see [p. 1011](#)). Scholars today are reckoning with this connectedness, as they work to understand the material realities of the flow of money

and goods around the globe in the period. An estate in the English countryside could be purchased with wealth gained in India by a family who wandered its gardens wearing furs from the Hudson Bay. Its table could be loaded with tea from China (which had been carried on ships containing North American timber or tar) and with sugar from plantations in Jamaica (farmed by enslaved laborers from Africa). That seemingly isolated and idyllic rural English country estate house was a part and a product of these complex networks of global commerce and international military power.

This cluster offers a range of perspectives on these realities. It features British paeans to commerce and empire but also scathing British critiques: some feared that Britain was extending itself too far and that its accumulations of wealth and power would inevitably lead to corruption at home. The cluster features, too, perspectives from outside Britain, real or imagined voices from America, India, China, and Tahiti—sometimes highly critical, sometimes complexly entangled in the events happening on the ground. One recurring theme in all these texts is identity. The realities of Britain's imperial project necessitated encounters between people who looked, dressed, worshiped, and behaved differently from one another. Period texts constantly take up questions about identities of the self and other: there are racist discussions of "savagery" and sentimentalized treatments of innocent "primitive" cultures, fine-grained discussions about familiar and unfamiliar cultural practices, shifting assumptions about the relationship between culture and race, celebrations of British identity, critiques of British behavior, and meditations on "HUMANITY" itself.

A few of the selections here were written as pragmatic political documents—a speech in Parliament, a petition to a state governor, a declaration of independence—but the rest are self-consciously literary. Postcolonial scholar Suvir Kaul has shown that literature played an active role in British "mercantile and colonial expansion": eighteenth-century poets aimed "to intervene in these processes, to inform and to mold them." They often thematized British imperial history, prophesized its future, and offered patriotic celebrations of

their nation and culture. Further, whether poetic or not, many of the texts here feature complex work with literary voice. James Mulholland has pointed out that eighteenth-century British authors often tried to understand themselves and their imperial projects by giving voice to imagined perspectives “from *over there* or *back then*,” from “the edges of their empire” or “the distant past.” Gerald Fitzgerald, an Irishman, pretends to be a Tahitian princess (see [p. 343](#)), and Oliver Goldsmith, in London, impersonates a Chinese philosopher (see [p. 335](#)). (Elsewhere in this volume, Jonathan Swift creates characters from imagined islands, and Thomas Gray and James Macpherson, as Ossian, give voice to doomed bards from the Welsh and Scottish pasts.) Moreover, outside of England, eighteenth-century writers in colonial outposts strategically worked both with and against British idioms. Samson Occom used a Christian rhetoric he learned from British settlers to advocate for his fellow Indigenous people in North America (see [p. 355](#)), and one of these settlers, Thomas Jefferson, took up a language of rights and freedom that was flourishing in Britain even as those colonies broke away from its power (see [p. 338](#)). Indian writer Dean Mahomet—like the formerly enslaved Olaudah Equiano (see [p. 1081](#))—embraced the genre of autobiography.

British literature, in short, was an agent of empire and a site of its contestation. British literature was also itself an imperial commodity, shipped and sold all over the world. The selections in this cluster foreground these realities, but the implications are far-reaching: just as that seemingly insulated rural English country estate was deeply enmeshed in the complex networks of empire, so too every text in this anthology.



## JOSEPH ADDISON

In *Spectator* 69, Addison takes a characteristically sunny view of commerce and what he calls the “additional empire” that it was helping his country secure, along with its empire of distant conquered and settled lands. The essayist enjoys the multicultural interactions that commerce permits, celebrating the friendliness and cooperation at the Royal Exchange among representatives of all nations, including those not only of Europe but also of China, Japan, Egypt, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, and other places. Though citizens of France and the Dutch Republic briefly appear in the essay, Addison does not mention the wars Britain waged abroad against these imperial and commercial rivals, nor those against peoples around the globe with resources that the British coveted. He only glancingly refers to a British sugar colony, Barbados, and what is produced there, and does not refer to the British trade in enslaved Africans at all.

# [The Royal Exchange]

**The Spectator 69, Saturday, May 19, 1711**

*Hic segetes, illic veniunt felicius uvae:  
Arborei foetus alibi, atque injussa virescunt  
Gramina. Nonne vides, croceos ut Tmolus odores,  
India mittit ebur, molles sua thura Saboei?  
At Chalybes nudi ferrum, virosaque Pontus  
Castorea, Eliadum palmas Epirus equarum?  
Continuo has leges aeternaque foedera certis  
Imposuit Natura locis<sup>1</sup>. . .*

—VIRGIL, *Georgics* 1.54–61

There is no place in the town which I so much love to frequent as the Royal Exchange.<sup>2</sup> It gives me a secret satisfaction, and in some measure gratifies my vanity as I am an Englishman, to see so rich an assembly of countrymen and foreigners consulting together upon the private business of mankind, and making this metropolis a kind of emporium for the whole earth. I must confess I look upon High Change<sup>3</sup> to be a great council in which all considerable nations have their representatives. Factors<sup>4</sup> in the trading world are what ambassadors are in the politic world; they negotiate affairs, conclude treaties, and maintain a good correspondence between those wealthy societies of men that are divided from one another by seas and oceans or live on the different extremities of a continent. I have often been pleased to hear disputes adjusted between an inhabitant of Japan and an alderman of London, or to see a subject of the Great Mogul entering into a league with one of the Czar of Muscovy.<sup>5</sup> I am infinitely delighted in mixing with these several ministers of commerce as they are distinguished by their different walks<sup>6</sup> and

different languages. Sometimes I am jostled among a body of Armenians; sometimes I am lost in a crowd of Jews; and sometimes make one in a group of Dutchmen. I am a Dane, Swede, or Frenchman at different times; or rather fancy myself like the old philosopher,<sup>7</sup> who upon being asked what countryman he was, replied that he was a citizen of the world.



The bustle of the **Royal Exchange** in the 18th century. Etching by Francesco Bartolozzi (1788).

---

Though I very frequently visit this busy multitude of people, I am known to nobody there but my friend Sir Andrew, who often smiles upon me as he sees me bustling in the crowd, but at the same time connives<sup>8</sup> at my presence without taking any further notice of me. There is indeed a merchant of Egypt who just knows me by sight, having formerly remitted me some money to Grand Cairo; but as I am not versed in the modern Coptic,<sup>9</sup> our conferences go no further than a bow and a grimace.

This grand scene of business gives me an infinite variety of solid and substantial entertainments. As I am a great lover of mankind, my heart naturally overflows with pleasure at the sight of a prosperous and happy multitude, insomuch that at many public solemnities I cannot forbear expressing my joy with tears that have stolen down my cheeks. For this reason I am wonderfully delighted to see such a body of men thriving in their own private fortunes and at the same time promoting the public stock; or in other words, raising estates for their own families by bringing into their country whatever is wanting, and carrying out of it whatever is superfluous.

Nature seems to have taken a particular care to disseminate her blessings among the different regions of the world with an eye to this mutual intercourse and traffic among mankind, that the natives of the several parts of the globe might have a kind of dependence upon one another and be united together by their common interest. Almost every degree<sup>1</sup> produces something peculiar to it. The food often grows in one country and the sauce in another. The fruits of Portugal are corrected by the products of Barbados; the infusion of a China plant sweetened with the pith of an Indian cane. The Philippick Islands<sup>2</sup> give a flavor to our European bowls. The single dress of a woman of quality is often the product of an hundred climates. The muff and the fan come together from the different ends of the earth. The scarf is sent from the torrid zone and the tippet<sup>3</sup> from beneath the pole. The brocade petticoat rises out of the mines of Peru and the diamond necklace out of the bowels of Indostan.<sup>4</sup>

If we consider our own country in its natural prospect without any of the benefits and advantages of commerce, what a barren uncomfortable spot of earth falls to our share! Natural historians tell us that no fruit grows originally among us besides hips and haws, acorns and pig-nuts, with other delicacies of the like nature; that our climate of itself and without the assistances of art can make no further advances towards a plum than to a sloe and carries an apple to no greater a perfection than a crab;<sup>5</sup> that our melons, our peaches, our figs, our apricots, and cherries are strangers among us, imported in different ages and naturalized in our English gardens;

and that they would all degenerate and fall away into the trash of our own country, if they were wholly neglected by the planter and left to the mercy of our sun and soil. Nor has traffic<sup>6</sup> more enriched our vegetable world than it has improved the whole face of nature among us. Our ships are laden with the harvest of every climate; our tables are stored with spices, and oils, and wines; our rooms are filled with pyramids of China and adorned with the workmanship of Japan; our morning's draught comes to us from the remotest corners of the earth. We repair our bodies by the drugs of America and repose ourselves under Indian canopies. My friend Sir Andrew calls the vineyards of France our gardens; the Spice-Islands our hot-beds; the Persians our silk-weavers, and the Chinese our potters. Nature indeed furnishes us with the bare necessities of life, but traffic gives us great variety of what is useful, and at the same time supplies us with every thing that is convenient and ornamental. Nor is it the least part of this our happiness that whilst we enjoy the remotest products of the north and south, we are free from those extremities of weather which give them birth; that our eyes are refreshed with the green fields of Britain at the same time that our palates are feasted with fruits that rise between the tropics.

For these reasons there are no more useful members in a commonwealth than merchants. They knit mankind together in a mutual intercourse of good offices, distribute the gifts of nature, find work for the poor, add wealth to the rich, and magnificence to the great. Our English merchant converts the tin of his own country into gold and exchanges his wool for rubies. The Mahometans are clothed in our British manufacture and the inhabitants of the frozen zone warmed with the fleeces of our sheep.

When I have been upon the 'Change, I have often fancied one of our old kings standing in person where he is represented in effigy, and looking down upon the wealthy concourse of people with which that place is every day filled. In this case, how would he be surprised to hear all the languages of Europe spoken in this little spot of his former dominions, and to see so many private men, who in his time would have been the vassals of some powerful baron, negotiating



like princes for greater sums of money than were formerly to be met with in the Royal Treasury! Trade, without enlarging the British territories, has given us a kind of additional empire. It has multiplied the number of the rich, made our landed estates infinitely more valuable than they were formerly, and added to them an accession of other estates as valuable as the lands themselves.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Here grain, there grapes grow more successfully, and elsewhere young trees and grasses sprout up spontaneously. Don't you see how Tmolus sends us fragrant saffron, India sends ivory, the soft Sabaeans send frankincense; but the naked Chalybes offer us iron, Pontus the pungent beaver-oil, and Epirus their award-winning horses? From the beginning, nature imposed these laws, and made eternal covenants with particular places (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A financial institution in the City of London near the Bank of England; a center where businessmen gathered and around two hundred shops and private companies were assembled. Opened in 1570, its first buildings were burned in the Great Fire of 1666: Addison discusses the Exchange as it was rebuilt in 1669.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The time of day when trading is most active.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Agents who buy and sell for other people.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Russia. The Great Mogul was a European name for the Mughal emperor, whose dominions extended throughout much of the Indian subcontinent.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ways of life.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Diogenes the Cynic (4th century B.C.E.).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Winks.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Language of the Copts, a sect of Egyptian Christians.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Here, a degree of latitude, hence a particular position on the earth's surface.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Philippines.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A cape or other hanging part of a woman's dress.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: India.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Crabapple. "Hips and haws": rosehips and the berries of the hawthorn tree. "Pig-nuts": or groundnuts, the tuber of *Bunium flexuosum*.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Trade.[Return to reference 6](#)

## ALEXANDER POPE

As a locale, Windsor Forest in the Thames Valley west of London united multiple kinds of deeply felt meaning for the young Alexander Pope, some personal, others much grander. He grew up and played as a boy in the area and said he wrote the first part of *Windsor-Forest*, to around line 290, when he was sixteen. Scholars have shown that he extensively revised the whole of the poem when he published it as a stand-alone text, including the latter part, in 1713. The finished work joins a keen pleasure in beauties of the forest, a royal hunting ground near the town and castle of Windsor, to a mythic vision of the British monarchy and nation, and a celebration of the Treaty of Utrecht, which ended the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14) between France and Spain on one side and the Grand Alliance, which included England, on the other. After depicting a natural world of harmonized difference under Queen Anne, the poem presents a long, violent account of English history, from the tyranny of William the Conqueror (ca. 1028–1087) to the execution of Charles I (1600–1649). The poem's latter part, included here, uses the voice of the mighty river Thames, which draws together the tributary streams of the nation and flows out into the oceans of the world, to predict an era of English global commercial and imperial dominion and peace. Pope draws inspiration from the poetic visions of Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.), in the *Eclogues* (ca. 39–38 B.C.E.) and *Georgics* (before 37 B.C.E.), of the world's future Golden Age under imperial Rome, as well as from the biblical book of Isaiah. Pope's prophecy would prove to be partly true. Britain's empire would grow to vast proportions in the decades to come. But expansion would involve near perpetual conflict with its old enemies France and Spain; and the dream at poem's end of a British Empire without violence, slavery, and expropriation would not be realized.



# ***From Windsor-Forest***

**To the Right Honorable George Lord Lansdown<sup>1</sup>**

*Non injussa cano: Te nostræ Vare myricæ  
Te Nemus omne canet; nec Phoebæ gratior ulla est  
Quam sibi quæ Vari præscripsit pagina nomen.*  
—VIRGIL, *Eclogues* 6.9–12<sup>2</sup>

Thy forests, Windsor! and thy green retreats,  
At once the monarch's and the muse's seats,<sup>3</sup>  
Invite my lays.° Be present, sylvan maids!°  
Unlock your springs, and open all your shades.  
Granville commands; your aid O muses bring!  
5 What muse for Granville can refuse to sing?

The groves of Eden, vanished now so long,  
Live in description, and look green in song:  
These,° were my breast inspired with equal flame,  
Like them in beauty, should be like in fame.  
10 Here hills and vales, the woodland and the plain,  
Here earth and water seem to strive again;  
Not Chaos-like together crushed and bruised,  
But as the world, harmoniously confused:  
Where order in variety we see,  
15 And where, though all things differ, all agree.  
Here waving groves a checkered scene display,  
And part admit and part exclude the day;  
As some coy nymph her lover's warm address  
Nor quite indulges, nor can quite repress.  
20 There, interspersed in lawns and opening glades,  
Thin trees arise that shun each other's shades.

Here in full light the russet<sup>o</sup> plains extend;  
There wrapt in clouds the blueish hills ascend.  
Ev'n the wild heath displays her purple dyes,  
25 And 'midst the desert fruitful fields arise,  
That crowned with tufted<sup>o</sup> trees and springing corn,<sup>o</sup>  
Like verdant isles the sable waste<sup>o</sup> adorn.  
Let India boast her plants, nor envy we  
The weeping amber or the balmy tree,  
30 While by our oaks the precious loads are borne,  
And realms commanded which those trees adorn.<sup>4</sup>  
Not proud Olympus yields a nobler sight,  
Though gods assembled grace his towering height,  
Than what more humble mountains offer here,  
35 Where, in their blessings, all those gods appear.  
See Pan with flocks, with fruits Pomona crowned,  
Here blushing Flora paints th'enameled ground,  
Here Ceres' gifts<sup>5</sup> in waving prospect stand,  
And nodding tempt the joyful reaper's hand;  
40 Rich Industry<sup>o</sup> sits smiling on the plains,  
And peace and plenty tell, a Stuart reigns.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

325 At length great Anna said "Let discord cease!"<sup>7</sup>  
She said, the world obeyed, and all was peace!

In that blest moment, from his oozy bed  
Old father Thames advanced his reverend head.  
His tresses dropped with dews, and o'er the stream  
His shining horns diffused a golden gleam:<sup>8</sup>  
330 Graved on his urn, appeared the moon that guides  
His swelling waters, and alternate tides;<sup>9</sup>  
The figured streams in waves of silver rolled,  
And on their banks Augusta<sup>1</sup> rose in gold.  
Around his throne the sea-born brothers<sup>2</sup> stood,  
335 Who swell with tributary urns his flood:<sup>o</sup>

First the famed authors of his ancient name,  
The winding Isis and the fruitful Tame:<sup>3</sup>  
The Kennet swift, for silver eels renowned;  
The Loddon slow, with verdant alders crowned;  
340 Cole, whose clear streams his flowery islands lave;<sup>o</sup>  
And chalky Wey, that rolls a milky wave:  
The blue, transparent Vandalis appears;  
The gulphy Lee his sedgy tresses rears;  
And sullen Mole, that hides his diving flood;<sup>4</sup>  
345 And silent Darent, stained with Danish blood.<sup>5</sup>

High in the midst, upon his urn reclined,  
(His sea-green mantle waving with the wind)  
The god<sup>o</sup> appeared: he turned his azure eyes  
Where Windsor domes and pompous<sup>o</sup> turrets rise;  
350 Then bowed and spoke; the winds forget to roar,  
And the hushed waves glide softly to the shore.

“Hail sacred Peace! hail long-expected days,  
That Thames’s glory to the stars shall raise!  
Though Tiber’s streams immortal Rome behold,  
355 Though foaming Hermus swells with tides of gold,  
From heaven itself though seven-fold Nilus<sup>6</sup> flows,  
And harvests on a hundred realms bestows;  
These now no more shall be the muse’s themes,  
Lost in my fame, as in the sea their streams.  
360 Let Volga’s banks with iron squadrons shine,  
And groves of lances glitter on the Rhine,  
Let barbarous Ganges arm a servile train;<sup>7</sup>  
Be mine the blessings of a peaceful reign.  
No more my sons shall dye with British blood  
365 Red Iber’s sands, or Ister’s foaming flood;<sup>8</sup>  
Safe on my shore each unmolested swain  
Shall tend the flocks, or reap the bearded grain;  
The shady empire shall retain no trace

370 Of war or blood, but in the sylvan chase;<sup>o</sup>  
The trumpet sleep, while cheerful horns are blown,  
And arms employed on birds and beasts alone.  
Behold! th'ascending villas on my side,  
Project long shadows o'er the crystal tide.  
Behold! Augusta's glittering spires increase,  
375 And temples rise,<sup>9</sup> the beauteous works of Peace.  
I see, I see where two fair cities bend  
Their ample bow, a new Whitehall ascend!<sup>1</sup>  
There mighty nations shall enquire their doom,  
The world's great oracle in times to come;  
380 There kings shall sue, and suppliant states be seen  
Once more to bend before a British queen.<sup>2</sup>

Thy trees, fair Windsor! now shall leave their  
woods,  
And half thy forests rush into my floods,  
Bear Britain's thunder, and her cross display,<sup>3</sup>  
385 To the bright regions of the rising day;<sup>o</sup>  
Tempt icy seas, where scarce the waters roll,  
Where clearer flames<sup>o</sup> glow round the frozen pole;  
Or under southern skies exalt their sails,  
Led by new stars, and borne by spicy gales!<sup>o</sup>  
390 For me the balm shall bleed, and amber flow,  
The coral redden, and the ruby glow,  
The pearly shell its lucid globe enfold,  
And Phoebus warm the ripening ore to gold.<sup>4</sup>  
The time shall come, when free as seas or wind  
395 Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind,  
Whole nations enter with each swelling tide,  
And seas but join the regions they divide;  
Earth's distant ends our glory shall behold,  
And the new world launch forth to seek the old.  
400 Then ships of uncouth<sup>o</sup> form shall stem the tide,  
And feathered people crowd my wealthy side,

And naked youths and painted chiefs admire<sup>o</sup>  
Our speech, our color, and our strange attire!<sup>5</sup>  
Oh stretch thy reign, fair Peace! from shore to shore,  
405 'Till conquest cease, and slavery be no more;<sup>6</sup>  
'Till the freed Indians in their native groves  
Reap their own fruits, and woo their sable<sup>7</sup> loves,  
Peru once more a race of kings behold,  
And other Mexicos be roofed with gold.<sup>8</sup>  
410 Exiled by thee<sup>o</sup> from earth to deepest hell,  
In brazen bonds shall barbarous Discord dwell:  
Gigantic Pride, pale Terror, gloomy Care,  
And mad Ambition, shall attend her there:  
There purple Vengeance bathed in gore retires,  
415 Her weapons blunted, and extinct her fires:  
There hateful Envy her own snakes shall feel,  
And Persecution mourn her broken wheel:<sup>9</sup>  
There Faction roar, Rebellion bite her chain,  
And gasping Furies thirst for blood in vain."  
420

Here cease thy flight, nor with unhallowed lays  
Touch the fair fame of Albion's<sup>o</sup> golden days:  
The thoughts of gods let Granville's verse recite,  
And bring the scenes of opening fate to light.  
My humble muse, in unambitious strains,  
425 Paints the green forests and the flowery plains,  
Where Peace descending bids her olives<sup>1</sup> spring,  
And scatters blessings from her dove-like wing.  
Ev'n I more sweetly pass my careless days,  
Pleased in the silent shade with empty praise;  
430 Enough for me, that to the listening swains  
First in these fields I sung the sylvan strains.

- Note 1: George Granville, Baron Lansdowne and Jacobite Duke of Albemarle (1666–1735), was Queen Anne’s Tory secretary at war who helped negotiate the Treaty of Utrecht, and also a poet and successful playwright.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: I don’t sing without prompting: our tamarisk trees and all our groves will sing of you, Varus; nothing is more pleasing to Phoebus Apollo than the name of Varus written on a title page (Latin). “Vare”: Publius Alfenus Varus, Roman jurist and writer (1st century B.C.E.). Pope’s poem draws inspiration from Virgilian celebrations of Roman imperial power and peace in the *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The place is linked with the poetic muse in part because John Denham (1614/15–1669) set his famous poem *Cooper’s Hill* (1642), a model for *Windsor-Forest*, in the Thames Valley, where Windsor is located. “The monarch’s”: the deep association of Windsor with the monarchy begins with legendary accounts of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table convening there.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: England’s oaks were used to build ships, which carry “precious loads” of spices from India, a land adorned with “the weeping amber or the balmy tree.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Grain. Ceres is the Roman goddess of cereal crops and agriculture generally. “Pan”: Greek god of shepherds and flocks. “Pomona”: Roman goddess of fruit. “Flora”: Roman goddess of flowers.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:  
A politically charged line. Queen Anne’s reign began in 1702, upon the death of William III of Orange, Dutch Protestant king of England, Scotland, and Ireland, who assumed the monarchy in 1689 after the Catholic, Stuart king, James II, was deposed. Anne, daughter of James II but raised a Protestant, returned the Stuart line to the throne, after an Act of Settlement had determined in 1701 that only Protestants could wear the crown. But she would die without an heir in 1714, soon after *Windsor-Forest* was published. Some readers take the line as signifying Pope’s loyalty not only to Anne but to the Catholic Stuart family

exiled in France: James Francis Edward Stuart (1688–1766), son of James II (d. 1701), maintained his right to the throne, and would lead a rising in Scotland in 1715, after George I of Hanover had become king.

[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: The intervening lines depict rural sports in the forest, including hunting, and narrate a long, violent history of the nation, rife with civil war and battles of the people against tyranny.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Rivers, especially the great river of England, the Thames, were often personified as gods in this way, and often depicted with horns.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The flow and level of the Thames were affected by tides through most of its London section.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Roman name for London.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rivers were said to be children of the Titan gods Oceanus and Tethys.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Isis, the upper section of the Thames which runs through Oxford, joins the river Thame at Dorchester on Thames; together they were said to be “authors” of the Thames’s “ancient name,” Tamesis, which was wrongly thought to be a combination of “Thame” and “Isis.” The rivers subsequently named, the Kennet, the Loddon, the Cole, the Wey, the Vandalis (commonly called the Wandle), the Lee, the Mole, and the Darent, were all tributaries of the Thames.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Between Dorking and Leatherhead, the Mole’s riverbed lies above the water table, seeming to flow underground, and can dry out in very hot summers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The English king Edmund Ironside defeated the Danes at Otford on the Darent in 1016.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Nile (Nilus) becomes “seven-fold” as it divides into its delta at the Mediterranean, and was the heart of the Egyptian Empire (“a hundred realms”). It was identified by some as the biblical river Gihon, one of the four rivers of Eden, said to flow from heaven. “Tiber”: the river of Rome was

associated with its imperial power. "Hermus": the Latin name for what is now called the Gediz, in ancient times the heart of the Lydian Empire in Asia Minor.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Politically subjugated followers. The armies of Muhi al-Din Muhammad (ca. 1618–1707), known as Aurengzeb, powerful Mughal emperor, waged wars along the Ganges River against the Marathi people of South Asia. "Volga's banks": along the Volga, Charles XII of Sweden (1682–1718) fought against Russian armies. "The Rhine": the Duke of Marlborough (1650–1722) had quickly advanced along the Rhine to victory at the Battle of Blenheim (1704), a major engagement of the War of the Spanish Succession, whose end Pope's poem celebrates.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Iberus (Roman name for the river now called the Ebro) in Spain, and the Ister (Greek and Roman name for the Danube) were scenes of important Allied victories in the War of the Spanish Succession.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Queen Anne commissioned fifty new churches in London to meet the needs of its growing populace.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Palace of Whitehall, principal residence of English monarchs, burned in 1698, and was situated where London and Westminster (then distinctly "two fair cities") meet, at a bend ("ample bow") in the Thames. Pope predicts its reconstruction, which was planned but never accomplished.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In 1575 and 1585, the Dutch asked Elizabeth I for aid in their wars against Philip II of Spain. "Sue": petition, appeal to.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The red cross of St. George on the English flag, or that cross incorporated into the Union Jack, the flag of a united Great Britain. "Leave their woods": timber from the forest will be used to build the country's navy and commercial fleet. "Thunder": cannons.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: It was thought that gems and precious metals "ripen" in the earth by the rays of the sun ("Phoebus"). The voice of the



Thames predicts that the riches of the world, including “balm” that bleeds from trees in India, and various gemstones, will be brought to it.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Pope imagines Indigenous peoples of the Americas coming to visit the Thames and England in their own ships. The thought may be inspired by the visit in 1710 of representatives of the Iroquois Confederacy on a diplomatic mission, which caused a sensation in London, introducing Britons to members of a very different culture, and encouraging them to view themselves, at least fancifully, from a non-European perspective.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pope’s vision of global peace seems to exclude the very institution over which the Peace of Utrecht established Britain’s substantial control: the treaties signed in March and April 1713, right at the time *Windsor-Forest* was published (March), included the *asiento de negros*, by which Spain granted Britain a monopoly on the transport of enslaved Africans to Spanish colonies in the Americas. The British government transferred this monopoly to the South Sea Company, in which Pope himself would invest in 1720.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Though “sable” commonly means “black,” it was a racializing term sometimes applied to describe the skin tone of various non-European people, including Indigenous people of America.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Pope imagines the restoration of Indigenous peoples’ rights and lands taken from them by the Spanish.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Persecution, like the other figures named in the passage, is a personified abstraction: her “wheel” represents an instrument of torture, now “broken,” commonly associated with the Spanish Inquisition. “Envy”: often figured with snakes, Envy falls victim to them herself.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Olive branches, symbol of peace.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *verses* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *woodland nymphs* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Windsor's groves* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *reddish brown* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grouped* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *grain* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wilderness* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *productive labor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flow* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *bathe* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the Thames* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *splendid* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the hunt* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the east* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the northern lights* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *breezes* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unfamiliar, strange* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wonder at* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Peace* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Britain's* [Return to reference](#) °

## JAMES THOMSON

This immensely popular patriotic song first appeared in a masque, a theatrical entertainment, in honor of Frederick, prince of Wales, titled *Alfred* (1740): like other writers of the period, Thomson evokes the image of Alfred the Great (849–899 C.E.) to locate the origins of British liberty in a Gothic past, free of modern corruption; the ode was originally sung by an actor dressed as an ancient bard accompanied by a British harp. But though the song looks backward in time to an image of a free Britain self-sufficient in its liberties, it also extends British power outward, across the waves, to suggest the nation's modern projects of imperial conquest, subjecting "every shore" of the world's oceans to its authority.

# Ode: Rule, Britannia

## 1

When *Britain* first, at heaven's command,  
Arose from out the azure main<sup>o</sup>  
*This* was the charter of the land,  
And guardian angels sung *this* strain:  
5 "Rule, *Britannia*, rule the waves;  
*Britons* never will be slaves."

## 2

The nations, not so blest as thee,  
Must, in their turns, to tyrants fall:  
While thou shalt flourish great and free,  
The dread and envy of them all.  
10 "Rule," etc.

## 3

Still more majestic shalt thou rise,  
More dreadful, from each foreign stroke:  
As the loud blast that tears the skies,  
Serves but to root thy native oak.  
15 "Rule," etc.

## 4

Thee haughty tyrants ne'er shall tame:  
All their attempts to bend thee down  
Will but arouse thy generous flame;  
But work their woe, and thy renown.  
20 "Rule," etc.

## 5

To thee belongs the rural reign;

25 Thy cities shall with commerce shine:  
All thine shall be the subject main,  
And every shore it circles thine.  
"Rule," etc.

## 6

30 The Muses, still<sup>o</sup> with freedom found,  
Shall to thy happy coast repair:  
Blest isle! with matchless beauty crowned,  
And manly hearts to guard the fair.  
"Rule, *Britannia*, rule the waves;  
"*Britons* never will be slaves."

1740**Notes**

1745–46

- <sup>o</sup>: *open ocean*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *always*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

## OLIVER GOLDSMITH

Irish author Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774) took up practically every literary genre, producing memorable works of drama, fiction, and poetry (see *The Deserted Village*, [p. 912](#)). He started his career in London among Grub Street journalists and eventually found his place among the eminences of the literary world. His first success was a series of letters, *The Citizen of the World*, which originally appeared in a London financial newspaper, the *Public Ledger*, in 1760; in revised form, they became a two-volume book in 1762. Goldsmith's letters adopt the perspective of a fictional character, Lien Chi Altangi, a Chinese scholar visiting London, who views the manners and beliefs of the British and of Europeans generally from a satirical and critical distance. The literary technique of defamiliarization, which presents ordinary elements of a social world from an outsider's perspective to reveal their strangeness, shapes many great works in the eighteenth century, particularly those that explore the nature of cultural difference against a background of a presumed common humanity. Inventing an astute, fictional, foreign observer to scrutinize one's home culture was not original to Goldsmith. Anticipating his use of the device are the *Persian Letters* (1721) of Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (1689–1755) and the *Chinese Letters* (1741) of Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d'Argens (1703–1771), French fictions widely read in English translation. Like those works, Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* is quasinovelistic. It creates characters whose stories develop across the sweep of the whole: they fall in love, wander the world, become enslaved and freed, and so on. But mostly the letters deploy cultural juxtaposition to expose shortcomings and reveal commonalities. As the title indicates, Goldsmith supposed, with many British writers of his time, that "the world" was composed of comparable if not equal peoples, which a discerning person from anywhere, situated anywhere, could judge. "The truth is, the

Chinese and we are pretty much alike," Goldsmith declares in his "Editor's Preface." And as in *The Citizen of the World*, the "rational" qualities commonly attributed to Chinese culture, politics, and religion were widely invoked by eighteenth-century British writers (however well or ill informed about the actualities of China and its history) to denounce corresponding deficiencies of their own nation.

# ***From The Citizen of the World***

## ***From the same.***<sup>1</sup>

Were an Asiatic politician to read the treaties of peace and friendship that have been annually making for more than an hundred years among the inhabitants of Europe, he would probably be surprised how it should ever happen that Christian princes could quarrel among each other. Their compacts for peace are drawn up with the utmost precision, and ratified with the greatest solemnity; to these each party promises a sincere and inviolable obedience, and all wears the appearance of open friendship and unreserved reconciliation.

Yet, notwithstanding those treaties, the people of Europe are almost continually at war. There is nothing more easy than to break a treaty ratified in all the usual forms, and yet neither party be the aggressor. One side, for instance, breaks a trifling article by mistake; the opposite party upon this makes a small but premeditated reprisal; this brings on a return of greater from the other; both sides complain of injuries and infractions; war is declared; they beat, are beaten; some two or three hundred thousand men are killed, they grow tired, leave off just where they began; and so sit coolly down to make new treaties.

The English and French seem to place themselves foremost among the champion states of Europe. Though parted by a narrow sea, yet are they entirely of opposite characters; and from their vicinity are taught to fear and admire each other. They are at present engaged in a very destructive war, have already spilled much blood, are excessively irritated; and all upon account of one side's desiring to wear greater quantities of furs than the other.<sup>2</sup>

The pretext of the war is about some lands a thousand leagues off; a country cold, desolate, and hideous; a country belonging to a people who were in possession for time immemorial. The savages of



Canada<sup>3</sup> claim a property in the country in dispute; they have all the pretensions which long possession can confer. Here they had reigned for ages without rivals in dominion, and knew no enemies but the prowling bear or insidious tiger; their native forests produced all the necessaries of life, and they found ample luxury in the enjoyment. In this manner they might have continued to live to eternity,<sup>4</sup> had not the English been informed that those countries produced furs in great abundance. From that moment the country became an object of desire; it was found that furs were things very much wanted in England; the ladies edged some of their clothes with furs, and muffs were worn both by gentlemen and ladies. In short, furs were found indispensably necessary for the happiness of the state: and the king was consequently petitioned to grant not only the country of Canada, but all the savages belonging to it to the subjects of England, in order to have the people supplied with proper quantities of this necessary commodity.

So very reasonable a request was immediately complied with, and large colonies were sent abroad to procure furs, and take possession. The French who were equally in want of furs (for they were as fond of muffs and tippetts<sup>5</sup> as the English) made the very same request to their monarch, and met with the same gracious reception from their king, who generously granted what was not his to give. Wherever the French landed, they called the country their own; and the English took possession wherever they came upon the same equitable pretensions. The harmless savages made no opposition; and could the intruders have agreed together, they might peaceably have shared this desolate country between them. But they quarreled about the boundaries of their settlements, about grounds and rivers to which neither side could show any other right than that of power, and which neither could occupy but by usurpation. Such is the contest, that no honest man can heartily wish success to either party.

The war has continued for some time with various success. At first the French seemed victorious; but the English have of late dispossessed them of the whole country in dispute.<sup>6</sup> Think not,

however, that success on one side is the harbinger of peace: on the contrary, both parties must be heartily tired to effect even a temporary reconciliation. It should seem the business of the victorious party to offer terms of peace; but there are many in England, who, encouraged by success, are still for protracting the war.

The best English politicians, however, are sensible, that to keep their present conquests, would be rather a burthen than an advantage to them rather a diminution of their strength than an increase of power. It is in the politic as in the human constitution; if the limbs grow too large for the body, their size, instead of improving, will diminish the vigor of the whole. The colonies should always bear an exact proportion to the mother country; when they grow populous, they grow powerful, and by becoming powerful, they become independent also; thus subordination is destroyed, and a country swallowed up in the extent of its own dominions. The Turkish empire would be more formidable, were it less extensive. Were it not for those countries, which it can neither command, nor give entirely away, which it is obliged to protect, but from which it has no power to exact obedience.

Yet, obvious as these truths are, there are many Englishmen who are for transplanting new colonies into this late acquisition, for peopling the deserts of America with the refuse of their countrymen, and (as they express it) with the waste of an exuberant nation. But who are those unhappy creatures who are to be thus drained away? Not the sickly, for they are unwelcome guests abroad as well as at home; nor the idle, for they would starve as well behind the Appalachian mountains as in the streets of London. This refuse is composed of the laborious and enterprising, of such men as can be serviceable to their country at home, of men who ought to be regarded as the sinews of the people, and cherished with every degree of political indulgence. And what are the commodities which this colony, when established, are to produce in return? Why raw silk, hemp, and tobacco. England, therefore, must make an exchange of her best and bravest subjects for raw silk, hemp, and

tobacco; her hardy veterans and honest tradesmen, must be trucked for a box of snuff or a silk petticoat. Strange absurdity! Sure the politics of the Daures<sup>7</sup> are not more strange, who sell their religion, their wives, and their liberty for a glass bead, or a paltry penknife.

Farewell.

## Endnotes

1760, 1762

- Note 1: Goldsmith's fictional author, Lien Chi Altangi, addressed letters to "Fum Hoam, First President of the Ceremonial Academy of Pekin, in China." "Pekin," or Peking, now transliterated "Beijing," is the capital of China. The publication's complete title was *The Citizen of the World, or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher Residing in London, to His Friends in the East*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Seven Years' War, 1756–63, a major global conflict for imperial and commercial supremacy fought primarily between France and Britain, had theaters in North and South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and India. As Goldsmith notes, among the issues of contention in the North American conflict (also called the French and Indian War) was fur-trading rights with Indigenous peoples in Canada and what would become the upper Midwest of the United States.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Despite his apparent recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples of North America, Goldsmith imagines Lien Chi Altangi calling them "savages," a derogatory term commonly used in the period to distinguish some societies from so-called civilized ones, which for Goldsmith included the Europeans and Chinese, among others.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Goldsmith's romanticized simplifications ignore the politics, history, and diversity of Indigenous peoples in North America. During the Seven Years' War, members of the Iroquois Confederacy were allied with the British, and nations living in what would become Canada, including the Algonquin and the Huron, allied with the French.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Short cloaks or capes worn over the shoulders.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: After several years of indecisive conflict, British forces won a string of victories in 1759, culminating in that of the armies of General James Wolfe in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, also known as the Battle of Quebec, in September of that year, which effectively consolidated British power in North America.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Daur are a Mongolic people of northeast China. Goldsmith's Lien Chi Altangi mentions them several times in *The Citizen of the World*, as here, to illustrate political or cultural qualities that would seem "strange" from a purportedly civilized European or (as Goldsmith imagines it) Chinese perspective.[Return to reference 7](#)

# THOMAS JEFFERSON

One of the most important political documents in world history, the American Declaration of Independence, composed primarily by Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), was first published as a broadside, titled “A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled,” by Philadelphia printer John Dunlap the night of July 4, 1776, hours after it was ratified by the Second Continental Congress, a little over a year after war between British troops and American colonists had begun. The publication’s primary purpose was news: people throughout the thirteen colonies had to be quickly informed that a new nation had been declared into existence. The first piece of the British Empire to break away from it, the colonies also knew it was urgent to immediately explain their dramatic course of action: the bulk of space in the broadside is given to the “causes”—what would come to be called the 27 Grievances—that made continued subordination to Britain intolerable to the new nation’s founders, rooted in particular disputes and struggles arising through the decade and a half since the end of the Seven Years’ War.

But the future life of the document would primarily grow from its second paragraph. Its articulation of basic human rights, which had its roots in Enlightenment thought developed in Britain itself and elsewhere in Europe, would function as something like a sacred text: a source of inspiration and frustration, an invitation to interpret, revise, expand, and question, and to judge the United States in relation to its purported ideals, which, for many, the Declaration encapsulated and expressed better than the Constitution itself, ratified twelve years later. The contradiction between the notion that all men are created equal and the institution of racialized chattel slavery woven into the new nation’s existence was obvious even to the founders and deplored immediately by abolitionists, including Black writers Prince Hall (see [p. 951](#)) and Lemuel Haynes (1753–

1833). Other forms of inequality in the united colonies were similarly glaring, as the Indigenous writer Samson Occom (see [p. 355](#)), among many others, pointed out. But the Declaration also served as a blueprint for the expansion of rights and freedoms beyond those of the White, male, propertied settlers of North America. At the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention devoted to women's rights, a Declaration of Sentiments directly revised the language of 1776: "we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal." In the 1850s, Frederick Douglass (who signed the Seneca Falls Declaration) extolled the "saving principles" of the Declaration of Independence even as he excoriated the hypocrisy of a nation that espoused them and enslaved human beings. Abraham Lincoln would attempt to re-found the nation on the Declaration's principles, quoting its assertion of the equality of all in the midst of the Civil War, in his most famous speech. And in subsequent decades, reformers and radicals, in the United States and throughout the world, would cleave to this ideal equality, while sometimes bitterly noting its continuing failure to be realized.

# **The Declaration of Independence**

## ***In Congress, July 4, 1776: A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled***

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which

constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of the present king of Great Britain<sup>1</sup> is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.<sup>2</sup>

He has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature, a right inestimable to them, and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the state remaining in the meantime exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners;<sup>3</sup> refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing Judiciary powers.<sup>4</sup>

He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.



He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.<sup>5</sup>

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies, without the consent of our legislatures.<sup>6</sup>

He has affected to render the military independent of and superior to the civil power.<sup>7</sup>

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction<sup>8</sup> foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:<sup>9</sup>

For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these states:<sup>1</sup>

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world:<sup>2</sup>

For imposing taxes on us without our consent:

For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury:

For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offences:<sup>3</sup>

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies:<sup>4</sup>

For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments:

For suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns,<sup>5</sup> and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny,<sup>6</sup> already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow citizens taken captive on the high seas to bear arms against their country,<sup>7</sup> to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages,<sup>8</sup> whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.<sup>9</sup>

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms: our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.

We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states; that they are

absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

Signed for by order and in behalf of the Congress, John Hancock, President<sup>1</sup>

## Endnotes

1776

- Note 1: George III (1738–1820) of Great Britain. Though many of the violations of what colonists asserted as their rights were enacted by the British Parliament, the document lays blame for the abuses on King George.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This and many of the following grievances focus on the colonists' central complaint, that self-government in the colonies was being denied in numerous ways by the king and Parliament: colonial legislatures were dissolved, their laws not recognized, the locations of their meetings changed arbitrarily, and so on. Such actions and inactions were taken by the British government to punish colonial authorities and citizens for their rebellious behavior toward representatives of the Crown, especially during the preceding ten years.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Colonial governments had long exercised authority over immigration, and Britain now saw the increase in the number of immigrants, from Germany and elsewhere, as a threat to its authority and a way for the colonies to increase their power, independence, and territorial control.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The right of citizens of Massachusetts to elect their own judges was revoked in 1774; henceforth, judges were appointed

by the Crown, ensuring their loyalty to the government (see also the subsequent grievance).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: To pay for the expensive Seven Years' War, the British government instituted numerous mechanisms (including the massively unpopular Stamp Act of 1765), and employed many officials, to collect tax revenue throughout the colonies.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Professional armies of paid soldiers, as opposed to volunteer militias called up only during wartime, were seen as an instrument of repression and tyranny, both by the colonists and by many in Britain throughout the 18th century.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In 1774, General Thomas Gage (1719–1787), British commander-in-chief of North America, also took control of “civil power” in Massachusetts, as its newly appointed governor.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Parliament of Great Britain.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Parliament's Quartering Act of 1765 required colonial legislatures to provide quarters and food to British soldiers; another Quartering Act, of 1774, gave this authority to royal governors.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In an altercation with British marines in Annapolis, Maryland, in 1765, two colonial citizens were killed, but the marines were acquitted after a sensational trial.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A series of Navigation Acts dating back to the 1660s restricted the trade of colonial America with France and Spain.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In 1774, the Administration of Justice Act stipulated that a colonial citizen accused of a serious crime could be tried in another colony, or in Britain, if the Crown believed that a local jury was prejudiced in favor of the defendant.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Quebec Act of 1774 allowed French civil law and culture, including Roman Catholicism, to hold sway in Quebec, after unsuccessful attempts to introduce English legal and

cultural practices to the population there. The act also expanded Quebec's boundaries into what would become the upper Midwest of the United States.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Among other attacks, this refers to a British naval bombardment that leveled Falmouth (now Portland, Maine) in 1775.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The first German auxiliary troops hired by George III, called "Hessians" by the colonists (from their origin in German states of Hesse-Kassel and Hesse-Hanau), would land on Staten Island in August 1776, to supplement the British Army in its efforts to put down the American rebellion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In late 1775, an act of Parliament authorized the seizure of colonial ships, and the impressment of the captured sailors into the British Navy to fight against the colonies.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:  
The final grievance comments on two separate developments. The "domestic insurrections" feared by colonists included those incited by the proclamation in April 1775 by John Murray, Earl of Dunmore (1730–1809), royal governor of Virginia, which promised freedom to all enslaved Black men able to bear arms (as well as to indentured servants) if they would join the British war effort. (Several hundred enslaved men did so, forming the Royal Ethiopian Regiment.) Though pertaining to Virginia, the proclamation was published throughout the colonies. The grievance also deplors, in typically racist language, efforts of General Gage to persuade Indigenous nations along the frontiers of the colonies to fight alongside the British.  
[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:  
In Jefferson's earlier draft, the fear of "domestic insurrections" in the 27th grievance was situated within a larger denunciation of slavery: it began, "He [George III] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery, or to

incur miserable death, in their transportation hither." The draft continued to note the irony of George (and Lord Dunmore) "exciting those very people to rise in arms against us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he also obtruded them"; and concluded by noting that the Crown and its representatives have resisted every attempt by various colonial legislatures "to prohibit or restrain an execrable commerce." These sentiments matched Jefferson's early theoretical conviction that slavery should be abolished in America, though he himself held around 200 enslaved people on his estates at the time. Decades later, after he had fallen silent on the question of abolishing enslavement and still held some 200 enslaved people, Jefferson would recall in his autobiography (1821) that the initially drafted passage was replaced in the Declaration's final version to placate Southern plantation owners and Northern merchants, both with a financial interest in perpetuating enslavement and the trade in enslaved people.

[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: John Hancock (1737–1793), president of the Second Continental Congress. [Return to reference 1](#)

## GERALD FITZGERALD

In the 1779 poem *The Injured Islanders*, an Irishman pretends to be a Tahitian queen in order to critique British colonialism. The poem features an important moment of contact between the British and Pacific islanders. In June 1767, Samuel Wallis—captain of the British ship *The Dolphin*—first encountered Tahiti (Otaheite, as it was called), an island previously unknown to Europeans. His arrival occasioned violence between the British forces and the islanders, before they were able to achieve some understanding of peace. Wallis claimed the island for the British, and Parea—the powerful local woman that Wallis mistook as queen—arrived later, offering gifts. Wallis and his crew stayed for several weeks and then departed again.

The author of *The Injured Islanders*, Gerald Fitzgerald, was a White clergyman at Trinity College in Dublin. He impersonates “Oberea” (a common European rendering of Parea’s name). As the poem’s speaker, she addresses an absent Wallis, after he left the island. In contrast to other available representations of Parea (often bawdy and satirical), Fitzgerald offers a notably sympathetic depiction. As he explains to readers, “Oberea” was a “Queen” who treated Wallis “with peculiar generosity and regard,” and her poetic monologue proceeds from “a remembrance of their mutual affection” and “a patriotic feeling for the fate of her country” in the aftermath—she fell from power shortly thereafter. Indeed, more than sympathetic, Fitzgerald uses his Tahitian persona to offer an impassioned critique of the negative effects of British exploration in the previously stable territories they “discovered.” He argues that British ships brought to Tahiti political violence, weapons, and disease. Fitzgerald also added learned footnotes (some of which are reproduced here) to substantiate his speaker’s critique with reference to printed accounts of recent Pacific voyages, including the Dublin edition of John Hawkesworth’s *Account of the Voyages Undertaken*



*by the Order of his Present Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere* (1773).



**“Interview between Captain Wallis and Oberea, Queen of Otaheite, after Peace being established with the Natives of that Island,”** early nineteenth century. This slightly later print closely resembles an image featured in the second edition of John Hawkesworth’s *An Account of the Voyages* (1773).

---

Fitzgerald’s full-throated critique of British imperial exploration, however, also reveals something of the limits of his sympathetic imagination. Given British misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Tahitian sexual practices, Purea’s relations were often sexualized—though there is no evidence that Purea and Wallis were lovers, as imagined here. And the happy ending that Fitzgerald has his version of Purea ardently wish for involves Wallis, a White British man, returning to the island and her rule being “aided by” him.



# ***From The Injured Islanders; or The Influence of Art Upon the Happiness of Nature***

## ***A Poetical Epistle from Oberea of Otaheite to Captain Wallis***

### ***From Preface***

Few subjects of similar nature have afforded more entertainment to the public than the late voyages to the southern ocean; their design, and the degree of success that has attended it, are now generally known: but whatever advantages either the spirit of enterprise, or commercial and scientific interests may derive from some discoveries that have been made in that distant hemisphere, it is much to be lamented, that the innocent natives have been sufferers by the event: the imaginary value annexed to European toys and manufactures, and the ravages of a particular disorder<sup>1</sup> have already injured their morals and their peace; even the instruments of iron, which so much facilitate the ordinary operations of industry, have been used as weapons of destruction, or perverted to the purposes of ambition and revenge.

\* \* \*

55      Late,<sup>o</sup> as along the verdure-vested<sup>o</sup> lawn  
My morning steps approached the blushing dawn,  
Far from the beach, and pendent<sup>o</sup> from the sky,  
A distant vessel caught my longing eye,  
The purple streamers, wave by wave, appear,  
And Love still whispers, lo! thy WALLIS near;  
60      Oh joyful hope!—to greet thee I prepare,  
And bind the tomou<sup>2</sup> round my fragrant hair,  
With grateful gifts of vegetable store

I haste impatient to the crowded shore,  
In vain I haste,—no Wallis meets me there,  
65 No friend, no fondness to reward my care,  
Bereft of pow'r, and destitute of train,<sup>o</sup>  
My humble off'rings scarce acceptance gain,  
To richer chiefs, who rule Taheitee's land,  
The British treasures pass from hand to hand,  
70 The crimson plumes,<sup>3</sup> the beads of brightest dye,  
The mirrors faithful to the gazer's eye,  
The precious gifts, whose boasted aid we feel,  
Of pointed iron, and of polished steel,—  
Boast though we may, to judge them by the past,  
75 These gifts may prove our fatal foes at last,  
By piercing steel though proudest forests fall,  
And take new forms at man's imperial call,  
By steel too man his fellow man annoys,<sup>o</sup>  
It tempts as plunder, and as death destroys,  
80 The dang'rous wealth exotic wants inspires  
Where equal Nature levelled all desires,  
And, social freedom sapped by envious strife,  
We risk at once our morals and our life.

Cursed the desire for wealth like this that made  
85 A rival chief my royal realms invade!  
The lifted ax—Ah! Wallis, shall I tell?  
On all our friends with dreadful havoc fell,  
An instant flight thy Obra<sup>o</sup> scarce could save  
Where the stern mountain<sup>4</sup> frowns upon the wave—  
90 Where cloud-girt<sup>o</sup> rocks their cheerless bosoms bare,  
The wretches' last sad refuge from despair,—  
There, to conceal me from the furious foe,  
I sunk depressed in solitary woe;  
As some tall palm-tree, sov'reign of the plain,  
95 That tops the grove, and glads th'admiring swain,<sup>5</sup>  
If sudden shook by autumn's angry storm,

Shrinks from the blast to hide its humbled form,  
 Stripped of its fruit, its foliage and its pride,  
 It naked stands, and droops on ev'ry side;  
 100 So helpless Obra, in a luckless hour,  
 Yields to her fate, divested of her pow'r,  
 Her only trust in Tanè's<sup>6</sup> wise decree,  
 In hope, in love, in justice and in thee.

Nor here alone Commotion's hostile hand  
 105 With rage and rapine wastes a trembling land,  
 'Gainst other shores what fatal projects rise!<sup>7</sup>  
 What fleets tremendous fill my wond'ring eyes!  
 Already launched I see their awful form  
 Mount the high waves, and dare the threat'ning  
 110 storm,  
 See their fell purpose Freedom to o'erwhelm,  
 Pride at the prow, Presumption at the helm—  
 See subject isles, late objects of our care,  
 Marked out for plunder, servitude, despair,—  
 Invading Pow'r imperial rights define—  
 115 Asserted Liberty these rights decline—  
 Discord and War in dread confusion rise  
 With widow's wailings, and with orphan's cries—  
 The ravaged plains to desolation giv'n,  
 And ev'ry crime that calls the wrath of heav'n:  
 120 Ah! What a change from all that charmed before,  
 When kindred love connected ev'ry shore,  
 When mutual int'rest, spreading unconfined,  
 Parental care and filial duty joined—  
 Such were the bands that held our happy state  
 125 Ere<sup>8</sup> lux'ry taught ambition to be great—  
 Ere lust of pow'r to deeds oppressive led—  
 Ere Europe's crimes with Europe's commerce spread;  
 Do these alas! thy hapless<sup>9</sup> country shake?  
 Corruption sap it, and contention break?  
 130

Or dares proud trade, if meant for all mankind,  
Here, only here, the dearest ties unbind?  
In stinted<sup>o</sup> regions pour its blessings round?  
In climes luxuriant ev'ry bliss confound<sup>o</sup>?

\* \* \*

Yes, Wallis, yes, from thee no fears alarm,  
Whose highest rage submission could disarm<sup>8</sup>—  
Well do my thoughts recall that awful<sup>o</sup> hour  
385 When first we felt, and trembled at thy pow'r,  
Some dreadful demon, with an hostile band,  
We feared thee sent to desolate our land,  
What could, alas! defenseless troops inspire?  
What check the fury of destructive fire?  
390 Repelled, confounded, patriot valor fled  
As all around the rapid ruin sped,  
Till first in mercy, as the first in sway,<sup>o</sup>  
Your pity spared what pow'r could take away,  
Resistance conquered saw resentment cease,  
395 Hushed was the war, and raised each downcast face;  
'Twas then to meet thee on the crowded shore  
The peaceful plantain<sup>9</sup> in my hand I bore,  
In due obeisance<sup>o</sup> half my bosom bared,<sup>1</sup>  
And found respect by mutual rites revered,  
400 A kindling zeal ere complaisance<sup>o</sup> began,  
And all the hero soft'ning in the man:  
Pleased with the manners of my mighty guest,  
I fearless led thee to the social feast,  
Where palm-spread sheds on stately pillars stood  
405 Midst cooling shades and vistas of the wood,  
Each op'ning front drew fragrance from the air,  
You gazed—you vowed a paradise was there,  
Smiled as the cocoa, soothing to the soul,  
Poured the sweet bev'rage<sup>2</sup> from its native bowl,  
410 Or varied viands<sup>o</sup> oped<sup>o</sup> their grateful store,

Fruits from the grove, and fishes from the shore,  
New wonder rose, when ranged around<sup>o</sup> for thee,  
Attendant virgins danced the Timrodee,<sup>3</sup>  
And vocal bards, the pleasure to prolong,  
415 Sung the bold deeds and heroes of their song,  
But chiefly thee, thy vict'ry and thy praise,  
The noblest subject of their simple lays,  
Till the tired sun, on western waves reposed,  
Dismissed the ev'ning, and the Heiva<sup>4</sup> closed.  
420

If native pleasures, simply thus supplied,  
Disclaim<sup>o</sup> the arts that minister to pride,  
What tempts thee, wand'ring with the faithless main,  
<sup>o</sup>  
To barter ease for perils and for pain?  
Does churlish Nature stint<sup>o</sup> thy parent soil?  
425 Does wealth superfluous prompt to wanton spoil<sup>o</sup>?  
Do restless longings for a deathless name  
Glow in thy breast, and animate thy frame?—  
Vain is each wish that flatt'ring hope inspires,  
If in the toil, the taste for joy expires,  
430 If unrestrained we urge the wayward mind  
Without a glance on wasting time behind;

\* \* \*

Ah! Wallis, haste—the dreadful regions shun,  
Where dismal deaths in dark disguises run,  
Where fancied lands, removed from every joy,  
If found, deceive us—if possessed, destroy;  
460 Here shalt thou find each solace of thy woes  
That man can ask—if what to ask he knows;  
Here, in thy fav'rite, fond Taheitee, still  
Its sons obsequious,<sup>o</sup> and its laws thy will;  
Thy faithful Obra, aided by thy hand,  
465 Again shall rise, the empress of the land,

470 Her awestruck foes, to shun impending ire,  
Quick to the mountain's silent gloom retire;  
Or prostrate—penitent—their deeds deplore,  
Her wrongs redress, her regal rights restore,  
Till, smiling Peace through ev'ry region seen,  
She rules triumphant, and expires a queen.

## Endnotes

1779

- Note 1: Europeans brought venereal disease to Tahiti. "Toys": frivolous manufactured objects.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Human hair plaited, in which they stick flowers of various kinds, particularly the (gardenia) Cape Jessamine [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Red feathers are highly valued at O'Taheite [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The mountains always afford them refuge from impending danger, till the passion of the conqueror, which is violent but not lasting, has subsided [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Rural youth. "Glads": makes glad.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A son of their supreme deities, whom they suppose to take a greater part in the affairs of mankind. See Hawkesworth's *Voyages* II.81 [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Fitzgerald's note laments an example of islander forces using "European tools" and weapons to fight their neighbors.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the islanders' willingness to submit disarmed Wallis's rage.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Green branches of trees, particularly of the plantain, are their symbols of peace [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lowering the garments, so as to uncover the shoulders, is in this country a mark of respect [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: For drink they have in general nothing but water, or the juice of the cocoa-nut; the art of producing liquors that intoxicate by fermentation, being happily unknown among them. Hawkesworth II.48 [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A Tahitian dance, one of several aspects of Tahitian culture that the British found titillating.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A concert of assembly—it is also a common name for every public exhibition. See the same author [Hawkesworth], I.474 [*Fitzgerald's note*].[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *lately* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clad with green* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hanging* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attendants* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *harms* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Oberea* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *encircled* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *before* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unfortunate* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *limited* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *destroy* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *awe-inducing* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *power* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *courtesy, reverence* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *politeness, desire to please* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foods* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *opened* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *laid out* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reject any connection with* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ocean* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *limit or restrict gifts to* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plunder* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *obedient* [Return to reference °](#)



## ANNA SEWARD

Anna Seward (1742–1809) was an influential poet of the later eighteenth century. She would become famous for poems that helped shift the direction of English poetics. Her lyrical sonnets played a key role in the Romantic sonnet revival, and her poems of self and nature featured a turn to inwardness and feeling that anticipated William Wordsworth. If her later influential works point toward new trends in Romantic poetry, though, in her earlier work—such as “An Elegy on Captain Cook” (1780), featured here—she took on the traditional, learned guise of the public poet who comments on current events.

Captain James Cook (1728–1779) was the most famous British explorer and cartographer of the eighteenth century. He was known for leading three important voyages to the Pacific, on ships called the *Endeavour* (1768–71) and the *Resolution* (1772–75, 1776–79). On these voyages, he visited, mapped, and made imperial claims of possession in what we now call New Zealand, Australia, and several other Pacific islands. He died in Hawaii on his third voyage, in a scuffle instigated by his attempt to hold a local leader hostage.

Seward drew in detail on Cook’s journals as she made him a symbol of what she saw as Britain’s heroic and moral project of exploration in the Pacific. The juxtaposition with the more critical description of British exploration in Fitzgerald’s poem (see above) could not be starker. Cook first visited Tahiti in 1769, two years after the encounter between Purea and Captain Wallis described in Fitzgerald’s poem, and Seward offers a much more positive and celebratory account of British influence there. Indeed, where Fitzgerald’s Oberea insists that “Europe’s crimes with Europe’s commerce spread,” Seward has British missions of discovery motivated by “HUMANITY.” Seward’s mythologizing account, like many others at the time, offers a racist description of Indigenous people as “savage” and treats European influence as purely positive.

In the period, patriotic poetry was a powerful vehicle for articulating this ideologically loaded, pro-imperial vision.

## ***From An Elegy on Captain Cook***

Sorrowing, the Nine<sup>o</sup> beneath yon blasted yew  
Shed the bright drops of pity's holy dew;  
Mute are their tuneful tongues, extinct their fires;  
Yet not in silence sleep their silver lyres;  
To the bleak gale they vibrate sad and slow,  
5 In deep accordance to a nation's woe.

Ye,<sup>1</sup> who ere while for COOK's illustrious brow  
Plucked the green laurel, and the oaken bough,  
Hung the gay garlands on the trophied oars,  
And poured his fame along a thousand shores,  
10 Strike the slow death-bell!—weave the sacred verse,  
And strew the cypress o'er his honored hearse;  
In sad procession wander round the shrine,  
And weep him mortal, whom ye sung divine!

Say first, what Pow'r inspired his dauntless breast  
15 With scorn of danger, and inglorious rest,  
To quit imperial London's gorgeous plains,  
Where, robed in thousand tints, bright Pleasure  
reigns;  
In cups of summer-ice her nectar pours,  
And twines, 'mid wintry snows, her roseate bow'rs?  
20 Where Beauty moves with undulating grace,  
Calls the sweet blush to wanton o'er her face,  
On each fond youth her soft artillery tries,  
Aims her light smile, and rolls her frolic eyes?

What Pow'r inspired his dauntless breast to brave  
25 The scorched equator, and th'Antarctic wave?  
Climes, where fierce suns in cloudless ardors shine,

And pour the dazzling deluge round the line;<sup>o</sup>  
The realms of frost, where icy mountains rise,  
‘Mid the pale summer of the polar skies?—  
30 It was HUMANITY!—on coasts unknown,  
The shiv’ring natives of the frozen zone,  
And the swart<sup>o</sup> Indian, as he faintly strays  
“Where Cancer reddens in the solar blaze,”<sup>2</sup>  
She<sup>3</sup> bade him seek;—on each inclement<sup>o</sup> shore  
35 Plant the rich seeds of her exhaustless store;  
Unite the savage hearts, and hostile hands,  
In the firm compact of her gentle bands;  
Strew her soft comforts o’er the barren plain,  
Sing her sweet lays, and consecrate her fane.<sup>o</sup>  
40

It was HUMANITY!—O nymph<sup>o</sup> divine!  
I see thy light step print the burning line!  
There thy bright eye the dubious pilot guides,  
The faint oar struggling with the scalding tides.—  
On as thou lead’st the bold, the glorious prow,  
45 Mild, and more mild, the sloping sun-beams glow;  
Now weak and pale the lessened lustres play,  
As round th’horizon rolls the timid day;  
Barbed with the sleeted snow, the driving hail,  
Rush the fierce arrows of the polar gale;  
50 And through the dim, unvaried, ling’ring hours,  
Wide o’er the waves incumbent horror low’rs.<sup>4</sup>

From the rude summit of yon frozen steep,  
Contrasting glory gilds the dreary deep!  
Lo!—decked with vermeil<sup>o</sup> youth and beamy<sup>o</sup> grace,  
55 Hope in her step, and gladness in her face,  
Light on the icy rock, with outstretched hands,  
The goddess of the new Columbus stands.  
Round her bright head the plummy peterels soar,<sup>5</sup>  
Blue as her robe, that sweeps the frozen shore;  
60

Glows her soft cheek, as vernal mornings fair,  
And warm as summer suns her golden hair;  
O'er the hoar<sup>o</sup> waste her radiant glances stream,  
And courage kindles in their magic beam.  
65 She points the ship its mazy path, to thread  
The floating fragments<sup>6</sup> of the frozen bed.

While o'er the deep, in many a dreadful form,  
The giant Danger howls along the storm,  
Furling the iron sails<sup>7</sup> with numbéd hands,  
70 Firm on the deck the great adventurer stands;  
Round glitt'ring mountains hears the billows rave,  
And the vast ruin thunder on the wave.<sup>8</sup>—  
Appalled he hears!—but checks<sup>o</sup> the rising sigh,  
And turns on his firm band a glist'ning eye.—  
Not for himself the sighs unbidden break,  
75 Amid the terrors of the icy wreck;  
Not for himself starts the impassioned tear,  
Congealing as it falls;—nor pain, nor fear,  
Nor Death's dread darts, impede the great design,  
Till Nature draws the circumscribing line.  
80 Huge rocks of ice th' arrested ship embay,  
And bar the gallant wanderer's dangerous way.<sup>9</sup>—  
His eye regretful marks the goddess turn  
Th' assiduous prow from its relentless bourn.<sup>o</sup>

85 And now antarctic Zealand's<sup>o</sup> drear domain  
Frowns, and o'erhangs th' inhospitable main.  
On its chill beach this dove of humankind  
For his long-wand'ring foot short rest shall find,  
Bear to the coast the olive branch<sup>o</sup> in vain,  
And quit on wearied wing the hostile plain.—  
90 With jealous low'r<sup>o</sup> the frowning natives view  
The stately vessel, and th' advent'rous crew;  
Nor fear the brave, nor emulate the good,

But scowl with savage thirst of human blood!<sup>1</sup>

95 And yet there were, who in this iron clime  
Soared o'er the herd on Virtue's wing sublime;  
Revered the stranger-guest, and smiling strove  
To soothe his stay with hospitable love;  
Fanned in full confidence the friendly flame,  
100 Joined plighted hands, and name exchanged for  
name.<sup>2</sup>  
To these the hero leads his living store,<sup>3</sup>  
And pours new wonders on th' uncultured shore  
The silky fleece, fair fruit, and golden grain;  
And future herds and harvests bless the plain.  
105 O'er the green soil his kids<sup>o</sup> exulting play,  
And sounds his clarion loud the bird of day;  
The downy goose her ruffled bosom laves,<sup>o</sup>  
Trims her white wing, and wantons in the waves;  
Stern moves the bull along th' affrighted shores,  
110 And countless nations tremble as he roars.

\* \* \*

Now leads HUMANITY the destined way,  
Where all the loves in Otaheite<sup>4</sup> stray.  
165 To bid the arts disclose their wond'rous pow'rs,  
To bid the virtues consecrate the bow'rs,  
She gives her hero to its blooming plain.—  
Nor has he wandered, has he bled in vain!  
His lips persuasive charm th' uncultured youth,  
Teach wisdom's lore, and point the path of truth.  
170 See! chastened love in softer glances flows,  
See! with new fires parental duty glows.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

- Note 1: The Muses.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Seward signals that this line is borrowed from James Thomson's *The Seasons* (*Summer*, line 43, slightly misquoted). "Cancer": a constellation, associated with the zodiac sign.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Humanity, personified.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "To appear dark, stormy, and gloomy" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The peterel [petrel] is a bird found in the frozen seas; its neck and tail are white, and its wings of a bright blue [*Seward's note*].[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "In the course of the last twenty-four hours, we passed through several fields of broken ice; they were in general narrow, but of considerable extent. In one part the pieces of ice were so close, that the ship had much difficulty to thread them" [*Seward's note*]. She quotes from Cook's *Voyage towards the South Pole and Round the World* (1777).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "Our sails and rigging were so frozen, that they seemed plated of iron" [*Seward's note*]. Unknown source.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The breaking of one of those immense mountains of ice, and the prodigious noise it made, is particularly described in Cook's second voyage to the south pole [*Seward's note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cook was searching for land near the Antarctic Circle, but ice made him turn around.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The British were fascinated by discussions of cannibalism (or anthropophagy) in New Zealand, though the historical facts and cultural meanings remain controversial and contested.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The exchange of names is a pledge of amity among these islanders, and was frequently proposed by them to Captain Cook and his people; so also is the joining noses [*Seward's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Captain Cook left various kinds of animals upon the coast, together with garden seeds, etc. The Zealanders had

hitherto subsisted upon fish, and such coarse vegetables as their climate produced; and this want of better provision, it is supposed, induced them to the horrid practice of eating human flesh [*Seward's note*]. Though the facts about anthropophagy are disputed, even one of the earliest reports from Cook's voyage suggested that hunger seemed unlikely as a motive, for there was plentiful food before the British arrived.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Tahiti.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Captain Cook observes, in his second voyage, that the women of Otaheite were grown more modest, and that the barbarous practice of destroying their children was lessened [*Seward's note*]. For a competing perspective on British influence in Tahiti, see Fitzgerald's poem, above.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *the Muses*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *equator*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dark*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *harsh*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *temple, sacred place*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mythological spirit*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *red*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *radiant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *white (with snow)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *represses*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aimed-for endpoint*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *(New Zealand)*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *symbol of peace*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gloominess*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *young goats*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *washes*[Return to reference °](#)



## EDMUND BURKE

The Anglo-Irish philosopher, statesman, and orator Edmund Burke (1729–1797) is best known for his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), a critique of revolutionary impulses and motives that would be a defining inspiration for modern conservatism, and *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), which he wrote in his twenties and which still influences discussions of aesthetics today. But he considered his life's great work to be British colonial policy in India. Serving in the House of Commons as a member for Wendover in Buckinghamshire (1765–74), then for Bristol (1774–80), then Malton (1780–94), he began in the late 1770s to scrutinize British Indian affairs, at the behest of the Whig faction in Parliament to which he was allied. By 1792, two years after his *Reflections* on the French Revolution appeared, he would write to a friend that “this Indian Affair” had been “the object of far the greatest and longest labor of a very laborious life,” taken up “on very public principles, and grounds that were of infinitely more importance than anything which related to me could possibly amount to.” Here he particularly refers to his leadership of the prosecution in the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, governor-general of Bengal, on charges of corruption and mismanagement, which dragged on, remarkably, from 1787 to 1795. The prosecution failed to make its case, which finally resulted in an overwhelming vote for acquittal. But Burke's involvement in British policy concerning India extended beyond determining the fate of Hastings: it centered on the extraordinary role of the British East India Company in South Asia. Though a private corporation, the Company orchestrated Indian politics, waged war, and collected taxes, all while relying on resources of the British government—a situation anticipating operations of multinational corporations in imperialist projects of the capitalist era. Founded in 1600, the Company increased its power enormously after its victory at Plassey over the

nawab of Bengal and his French allies in 1757, during the Seven Years' War. The selection below, from a speech Burke made in favor of a bill that would subject the Company to the oversight of the government, rises to a denunciation of a colonialism motivated only by the extraction of wealth: "an oppressive, irregular, capricious, unsteady, rapacious, and peculating despotism, with a direct disavowal of obedience to any authority at home," he calls it later in the speech. Even the settler colonialisms of earlier invaders of India from different parts of Asia, he argues, were superior to this. Burke recommends a better-managed colonialism, not a British withdrawal. And like his prosecution of Hastings, his efforts on behalf of this bill failed. But Burke's demands in this speech reflect the conviction he argued for throughout his career: that governors are duty-bound to promote the flourishing of those over whom they rule.

## ***From Mr. Burke's Speech . . . on Mr. Fox's East India Bill***<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

The several irruptions of Arabs, Tartars, and Persians<sup>2</sup> into India were, for the greater part, ferocious, bloody, and wasteful in the extreme: our entrance into the dominion of that country was, as generally, with small comparative effusion of blood; being introduced by various frauds and delusions, and by taking advantage of the incurable, blind, and senseless animosity which the several country powers<sup>3</sup> bear towards each other, rather than by open force. But the difference in favor of the first conquerors is this: the Asiatic conquerors very soon abated of their ferocity, because they made the conquered country their own. They rose or fell with the rise or fall of the territory they lived in. Fathers there deposited the hopes of their posterity; and children there beheld the monuments of their fathers. Here their lot was finally cast; and it is the natural wish of all that their lot should not be cast in a bad land. Poverty, sterility, and desolation are not a recreating prospect<sup>4</sup> to the eye of man; and there are very few who can bear to grow old among the curses of a whole people. If their passion or their avarice drove the Tartar lords to acts of rapacity or tyranny, there was time enough, even in the short life of man, to bring round the ill effects of an abuse of power upon the power itself. If hoards were made by violence and tyranny, they were still domestic hoards; and domestic profusion, or the rapine of a more powerful and prodigal hand, restored them to the people. With many disorders and with few political checks upon power, nature had still fair play; the sources of acquisition were not dried up; and therefore the trade, the manufactures, and the commerce of the country flourished. Even avarice and usury itself operated both for the preservation and the employment of national

wealth. The husbandman and manufacturer paid heavy interest, but then they augmented the fund from whence they were again to borrow. Their resources were dearly bought, but they were sure; and the general stock of the community grew by the general effort.

But under the English government all this order is reversed. The Tartar invasion was mischievous;<sup>5</sup> but it is our protection that destroys India. It was their enmity; but it is our friendship. Our conquest there, after twenty years, is as crude as it was the first day. The natives scarcely know what it is to see the gray head of an Englishman. Young men (boys almost) govern there, without society and without sympathy with the natives. They have no more social habits with the people than if they still resided in England; nor indeed any species of intercourse but that which is necessary to making a sudden fortune, with a view to a remote settlement.<sup>6</sup> Animated with all the avarice of age, and all the impetuosity of youth, they roll in one after another, wave after wave; and there is nothing before the eyes of the natives but an endless, hopeless prospect of new flights of birds of prey and passage, with appetites continually renewing for a food that is continually wasting. Every rupee of profit made by an Englishman is lost forever to India. With us are no retributory superstitions,<sup>7</sup> by which a foundation of charity compensates, through ages, to the poor, for the rapine and injustice of a day. With us no pride erects stately monuments which repair the mischiefs which pride had produced, and which adorn a country out of its own spoils. England has erected no churches, no hospitals,<sup>8</sup> no palaces, no schools; England has built no bridges, made no high-roads, cut no navigations, dug out no reservoirs. Every other conqueror of every other description has left some monument, either of state<sup>9</sup> or beneficence, behind him. Were we to be driven out of India this day, nothing would remain to tell that it had been possessed, during the inglorious period of our dominion, by anything better than the orangutan or the tiger.

There is nothing in the boys we send to India worse than in the boys whom we are whipping at school, or that we see trailing a pike<sup>1</sup> or bending over a desk at home. But as English youth in India drink

the intoxicating draught of authority and dominion before their heads are able to bear it, and as they are full grown in fortune long before they are ripe in principle, neither nature nor reason have any opportunity to exert themselves for remedy of the excesses of their premature power. The consequences of their conduct, which in good minds (and many of theirs are probably such) might produce penitence or amendment, are unable to pursue the rapidity of their flight. Their prey is lodged in England; and the cries of India are given to seas and winds, to be blown about, in every breaking up of the monsoon, over a remote and unhearing ocean. In India all the vices operate by which sudden fortune is acquired: in England are often displayed, by the same persons, the virtues which dispense hereditary wealth. Arrived in England, the destroyers of the nobility and gentry of a whole kingdom will find the best company in this nation, at a board of elegance and hospitality. Here the manufacturer and husbandman will bless the just and punctual hand that in India has torn the cloth from the loom, or wrested the scanty portion of rice and salt from the peasant of Bengal, or wrung from him the very opium in which he forgot his oppressions and his oppressor. They marry into your families; they enter into your senate;<sup>2</sup> they ease your estates by loans; they raise their value by demand; they cherish and protect your relations which lie heavy on your patronage;<sup>3</sup> and there is scarcely an house in the kingdom that does not feel some concern and interest that makes all reform of our Eastern government appear officious<sup>4</sup> and disgusting; and, on the whole, a most discouraging attempt. In such an attempt you hurt those who are able to return kindness or to resent injury. If you succeed, you save those who cannot so much as give you thanks. All these things show the difficulty of the work we have on hand: but they show its necessity too. Our Indian government is in its best state a grievance. It is necessary that the correctives should be uncommonly vigorous, and the work of men sanguine, warm, and even impassioned in the cause. But it is an arduous thing to plead against abuses of a power which originates from your own country, and affects those whom we are used to consider as strangers.

## Endnotes

1783, 1784

- Note 1: The entire title is *Mr. Burke's speech, On the 1st December 1783, upon the question for the Speaker's leaving the chair, in order for the House to resolve itself into a committee on Mr. Fox's East India Bill*. Like many of Burke's speeches in Parliament, this one was published, and quite long, running to 105 printed pages. "Mr. Fox's East India Bill": Charles James Fox (1749–1806), a leader of the Whig Party in Parliament; his East India Bill of 1783, drafted by Burke, proposed to nationalize the East India Company's operations and passed the Commons, but was voted down in the House of Lords, at George III's urging.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Persian emperor Nader Shah Afshar (1688–1747) led a series of successful campaigns across the Middle East, and Central and South Asia, defeating the Mughal Empire and entering Delhi in 1739. "Arabs": numerous incursions of Arab raiders into South Asia began as early as the 7th century C.E. "Tartars": Burke refers to the armies of Central Asia that established the mighty and wealthy Mughal Empire which ruled South Asia from 1526; its decline is commonly said to have begun in the 1710s.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As the power of the Mughal Empire in India waned through the first part of the 18th century, the Maratha Empire and numerous regional kingdoms were in conflict in South Asia.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A pleasing sight.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Grievously harmful.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An estate back in Britain.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Belief in eventual punishment if bad deeds are left unatoned for.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The paltry foundation at Calcutta is scarcely worth naming as an exception [*Burke's note*]. Burke refers to the Presidency General Hospital: its precursor was established in

1707 by the East India Company and expanded later in the 18th century, and is currently the IPGMER and SSKM Hospital of Kolkata (but still commonly called the Presidency General).[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Lasting works pertaining to the arts of government or political authority.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A common phrase for shouldering a musket as a volunteer (by Burke's time, the British Army no longer used pikes).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Parliament.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: They marry relations of the wealthy, who would otherwise have to be supported.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Meddling.[Return to reference 4](#)

## **SAMSON OCCOM**

Samson Occom (1723–1792) was an Indigenous person of the Mohegan tribe in what is now called Connecticut. In his autobiography, he wrote, “My parents lived a wandering life, as did all the Indians at Mohegan; they chiefly depended upon hunting, fishing, and fowling for their living and had no connections with the English, excepting to traffic with them in their small trifles.” Occom’s life, however, would be fundamentally shaped by connections with English settlers. Occom converted to evangelical Christianity as a teenager, studied English, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and eventually became a preacher famous on both sides of the Atlantic. He traveled to England, Scotland, and Ireland to help raise funds for a school for Indigenous students (what would become Dartmouth College, after the institution disappointed Occom by moving away from its original plan to serve Native youth). Throughout his life, Occom was an important Indigenous leader, working to support the continuity and autonomy of tribes in the American Northeast.

Occom spent many years among the Montaukett tribe in Montauk (at the east end of Long Island), and in 1751 he married a Montaukett woman, Mary Fowler. Included here is a petition that Occom helped craft, from the Montaukett tribe to the governor of New York. English settlers arrived in Montauk in the seventeenth century and had been slowly buying up and encroaching on traditional Montaukett land. The petition discusses in particular the terms of the disastrous 1703 treaties that the settlers had used to obtain legal title to most Montauk land and impose strict rules.

In the petition, Occom substitutes his singular “I” for a powerful collective “we,” his voice braided with those of other tribal leaders. They argue that, historically, English settlers had taken unfair advantage of ideas about writing, law, and land that the Montaukett people had not shared. In response, the petitioners strategically use their own English literacy and legal awareness, and their own



understanding of the Christian beliefs held by its representative in this case, the New York governor, to help redress the wrongs done to the Montaukett. But the petition also reminds us that eighteenth-century treaties were used to disenfranchise many: Indigenous people today still live with the damage wrought by this eighteenth-century literature.

# Montaukett Petition<sup>1</sup>

To the great and most excellent Governor, and to all the great men ruling the state of New York in North America—

We who are known by the name Mmeeeyautanheewuck, or Montauk Indians, humbly send greeting.

We are very glad and rejoice with you that you have at last got your freedom, liberty, and independence, from under the heavy and galling yoke of your late king, who has tried very hard to make you slaves, and have killed great many of you,<sup>2</sup> but by your steadiness, boldness, and great courage, you have broke the yoke and chain of slavery;<sup>3</sup>—now, God bless you, and make you very great and good forever.

We Montauk Indians have sot still and have not intermeddled in this family contention of yours, because we had no business with it,<sup>4</sup> and we have kept our young men quiet as we could, and the people on both sides have used<sup>5</sup> us well in general.

Now great and good gentlemen, we humbly entreat your condescension<sup>6</sup> and patience to hear us a little concerning ourselves.

The great and good spirit above saw fit in his good pleasure to plant our forefathers in this great wilderness but when and how, none knows but himself,—and he that works all things according to his own mind saw it good to give us this great continent and he filled this Indian world with variety, and a prodigious number of four-footed beasts, fowl without number and fish of all kinds great and small, filled our seas, rivers, brooks, and ponds every where,—and it was the pleasure of him who orders all things according to his good will, he that maketh rich and maketh poor, he that kills and that maketh alive, he that raiseth up whom he will and pulleth down whom he will, saw fit to keep us in poverty, only to live upon the provisions he hath made already at our hands. Thus we lived, till it pleased the great and good Governor of the world to send your

fathers into these goings down of the sun, and found us naked and very poor, destitute of every thing that your fathers enjoyed, only this, that we had good and large country to live in, and well furnished with natural provisions, and there was not a letter<sup>7</sup> known amongst them all in this boundless continent.—But your forefathers came with all the learning, knowledge, and understanding that was necessary for mankind to make them happy, and they knew the goodness of our land, and they soon began to settle and cultivate the land. Some they bought almost for nothing, and we suppose they took a great deal without purchase. And our fathers were very ignorant and knew not the value of land, and they cared nothing about it, they imagined they should always live by hunting, fishing, and fowling, and gathering wild fruits.—But alas at this age of the world, we find and plainly see by sad experience that by our forefathers' ignorance and your fathers' great knowledge, we are undone for this life.—Now only see the agreement your fathers and our fathers made,—we hope you won't be angry with us in telling the [     ].<sup>8</sup> They agreed that we should have only two small necks of land to plant on, and we are not allowed to sow wheat, and we as a tribe are stinted<sup>9</sup> to keep only 50 head of cattle, and 200 swine and three dogs.—Pray gentlemen take good notice, don't this discover a profound ignorance in our forefathers, indeed we suspect, sometimes, that what little understanding they had was drowned with hot waters<sup>1</sup> before they made these shameful agreements, and on the other hand, don't this show that the English took advantage of the ignorance of our forefathers? Would they be willing to be served so by us? Were we capable to use them so?—We fare now harder than our forefathers—for all our hunting, fowling, and fishing is now almost gone and our wild fruit is gone, what little there is left the English would engross or take all to themselves—and our wood is gone and the English forbid us of getting any, where there is some in their claim—and if our hogs happen to root<sup>2</sup> a little the English will make us pay damages, and they frequently count our cattle and hogs. Thus we are used by our English neighbors—pray most noble gentlemen consider our miserable case and for God's sake help us,

for we have nowhere to go now, but to your Excellence for help; if we had but 150 head of cattle and some sheep<sup>3</sup> and a few more hogs we should be contented and thankful.

This is all we have to say at this time, and shall now wait to see your pleasure concerning us—

## Endnotes

1788

- Note 1: This draft of the petition is in the Samson Occom Papers at the Connecticut Historical Society.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Referring to the American fight for independence from Britain, ratified by treaty in 1783. "Galling": frustrating, offensive.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The petition adopts American patriot rhetoric of British tyranny as slavery, now broken. Slavery as an institution continued.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Occom had wanted the Montaukett to maintain neutrality, though some tribe members were involved in the war.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Treated.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Deference, willingness of a superior to listen.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Of the written alphabet.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The manuscript is missing a word here.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Limited, bounded.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Alcohol.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dig in the soil.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The word in the manuscript is a bit unclear, but it appears to be *sheep*.[Return to reference 3](#)

## DEAN MAHOMET

Dean Mahomet was born in Patna in northern India in 1759 and died in Brighton, a resort town in southern England, in 1851. In the intervening years, he lived his life amid British imperial expansion. As a child, he lost his father, a soldier in the East India Company's army, and befriended a captain of that army, Anglo-Irishman Godfrey Evan Baker. In 1769, Mahomet himself joined the forces of East India Company—which began in 1600 as a trading company but increasingly (often violently) took over from Mughal rulers to control India as a British colonial holding. Mahomet traveled his native country as a representative of the imperial power that ruled it. Then, in 1783, he moved with Baker to another British imperial site, Ireland, where Mahomet would elope with an Irish woman and publish *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, an epistolary account for British audiences of his experiences in India. In 1807, he moved his family to England—first to London, where he opened “the Hindostanee Coffee House,” and then to Brighton, where he founded “Mahomed’s Baths” and practiced the Indian art of *champi* massage (“shampoo,” as Mahomet advertised it). Eventually, he would become the “shampooing surgeon” to the royal courts when they visited Brighton. Throughout his life, he capitalized on British interest—cultural and economic—in India.

Mahomet’s *Travels* offers both his autobiography and an important Indian perspective—in English—on India and the changes happening there. Throughout, Mahomet explains Indian culture to English readers and defends against racist attitudes, emphasizing the goodness and the civility of the Indian people. Among the excerpts here is Mahomet’s sympathetic account of Islam (the religion to which he was born, before converting to Christianity), and he elsewhere offers a lengthy, sympathetic discussion of the Hindu religion as practiced in India. Other writers in the period offered scathing indictments of the cruel British colonial policy (see Burke’s

speech, [p. 351](#)), but Mahomet's perspective is closer to the ground, more entangled in these changes as they happened. As his detailed explanation of the military illustrates, many Indians joined British colonial forces, which served as a path for advancement. But in a later letter, after describing a "hostile" encounter, he broke out into poetry:

Alas! destructive war, with ruthless hand,  
Unbinds each fond connection, tender tie,  
And tears from friendship's bosom all that's dear,  
Spreading dire carnage thro' the peopled globe.

As his modern biographer Michael Fisher explains, "*Travels* exposes the complex and often alienating attitudes Dean Mahomet—and tens of thousands of other Indians in service of the English company—held toward the British conquest. Many felt distanced from cultures of the old regimes which their ancestors had served. All remained apart from the Europeans who hired them. Like Dean Mahomet, each worked in distinct ways to create new social spaces for themselves between these cultures."

# ***From The Travels of Dean Mahomet***<sup>1</sup>

## ***From Letter I***

Dear Sir,

Since my arrival in this country, I find you have been very anxious to be made acquainted with the early part of my life, and the history of my travels: I shall be happy to gratify you; and must ingenuously confess, when I first came to Ireland, I found the face of everything about me so contrasted to those striking scenes in India, which we are wont<sup>2</sup> to survey with a kind of sublime delight, that I felt some timid inclination, even in the consciousness of incapacity, to describe the manners of my countrymen, who, I am proud to think, have still more of the innocence of our ancestors, than some of the boasting philosophers of Europe.

Though I acknowledge myself incapable of doing justice to the merits of men, whose happy manners<sup>3</sup> are worthy the imitation of civilized nations, yet, you will do me the justice to believe, that the gratification of your wishes is the principal incitement that engages me to undertake a work of this nature: the earnest entreaties of some friends, and the liberal encouragement of others, to whom I express my acknowledgements, I allow, are secondary motives.

The people of India, in general, are peculiarly favored by Providence<sup>4</sup> in the possession of all that can cheer the mind and allure the eye, and though the situation of Eden is only traced in the poet's creative fancy, the traveler beholds with admiration the face of this delightful country, on which he discovers tracts that resemble those so finely drawn by the animated pencil of Milton.<sup>5</sup> You will here behold the generous soil crowned with various plenty; the garden beautifully diversified with the gayest flowers diffusing their fragrance on the bosom of the air; and the very bowels of the earth enriched with inestimable mines of gold and diamonds.

Possessed of all that is enviable in life, we are still more happy in the exercise of benevolence and goodwill to each other, devoid of every species of fraud or low cunning. In our convivial enjoyments, we are never without our neighbors; as it is usual for an individual, when he gives an entertainment, to invite all those of his own profession to partake of it. That profligacy<sup>6</sup> of manners too conspicuous in other parts of the world, meets here with public indignation, and our women, though not so accomplished as those of Europe, are still very engaging for many virtues that exalt the sex.

\* \* \*

### ***Letter XIV***

Dear Sir,

The Mahometans<sup>1</sup> are, in general, a very healthful people: refraining from the use of strong liquors, and accustomed to a temperate diet, they have but few diseases, for which their own experience commonly finds some simple yet effectual remedy. When they are visited by sickness, they bear it with much composure of mind, partly through an expectation of removing their disorder by their own manner of treating it: but when they perceive their malady grows too violent to submit even to the utmost exertions of their skill, they send for a Mulna,<sup>2</sup> who comes to the bedside of the sick person, and putting his hand over him, feels that part of his body most affected, and repeats, with a degree of fervency, some pious prayers, by the efficacy of which it is supposed the patient will speedily recover. The Mahometans meet death with uncommon resignation and fortitude, considering it only as the means of enlarging them from a state of mortal captivity, and opening to them a free and glorious passage to the mansions of bliss. Those ideas console them on the bed of sickness and even amid the pangs of dissolution, the parting soul struggling to leave its earthly prison, and panting for the joys of immortality, changes, at bright intervals, the terrors of the grim monarch into the smiles of a cherub, who invites it to a happier region.



When a person dies among them, the neighbors of the same religious principles bring the family of the deceased to their houses, and use every means to comfort them in their affliction. The corpse is stretched on the death bed, which is covered with white muslin, and adorned with flowers: wax tapers<sup>3</sup> are lit about it, and the room hung round with white cotton. Numbers assemble together to pray for the departed spirit, and twenty-four hours after the decease of the person, on account of the excessive heat of the climate, the body is wrapped up in muslin, and carried towards the grave, near which it is laid down, before it is interred: all the people who attend the funeral kneel in a direct line beside it, imploring the great Alla to give the soul eternal rest: it is then consigned to the silent scene of interment, and the relations throw a little clay on it, after which it is covered. The Mulna consecrates a quantity of thin cakes, which he distributes in broken pieces among the people, who share them with each other, and join in prayer, while the eldest son of the deceased sprinkles the grave with holy water, and spreads a large white sheet over it. Four days after the funeral, the relatives entertain their neighbors and a multitude of poor people with unlimited hospitality, who, in gratitude for their munificence,<sup>4</sup> offer up their united petitions to Heaven for the kinsman of their benefactors.

People of condition have grand monuments erected to their memory, and lamps lighting at their tombs throughout the year: their houses also, on certain festivals, are magnificently illuminated in remembrance of them. The poorer natives perform this ceremony at the grave and their own habitations, but once in the year, for a short space of time. After the death of a husband, his wife puts on no mourning, and disrobing herself of all the ornaments of dress and jewels, wears only plain white muslin. In the middle walk of life, the widow enjoys the sole property,<sup>5</sup> which, making some reserve for herself, she generally divides in a very equitable manner, among her children: in more elevated situations, the son succeeds his father in rank or employment.

The Mahometans are strict adherents to the tenets of their religion, which does not, by any means, consist in that enthusiastic

veneration for Mahomet<sup>6</sup> so generally conceived: it considers much more, as its primary object, the unity of the supreme Being, under the name of Alla: Mahomet is only regarded in a secondary point of view, as the missionary of that unity, merely for destroying the idol worship, to which Arabia had continued so long under bondage:<sup>7</sup> and so far from addressing him as a deity, that in their orisons,<sup>8</sup> they do not pray to him, but for him, recommending him to the divine mercy: it is a mistaken, though a generally received opinion, that pilgrimages were made to his tomb, which, in a religious sense, were only directed to what is called the cahabah or holy-house at Mecca, an idol temple dedicated by him to the unity of God. His tomb is at Medina,<sup>9</sup> visited by the Mahometans purely out of curiosity and reverence to his memory. Most of his followers carry their veneration for the supreme Being so far, as not only never to mention the word Alla or God on any common occasion, but think it in some degree blasphemous to praise or define a Being, whom they consider as so infinitely transcendent to<sup>1</sup> all praise, definition or comprehension. Thus, they carry their scrupulosity to such a length, as not even to approve of calling him good, righteous, or merciful, from their thinking such epithets superfluous and impertinent; as if one were emphatically to say of a man that he had a head, or any other member necessary to the human form: for they conceive it to be a profanation of the name of God, to accompany it with human attributes; and that no idea can be so acceptable to that Being, as the name itself, a substantive<sup>2</sup> infinitely superior and independent of the connection of any adjective to give it the least degree of additional emphasis.

### ***Letter XVI***

Dear Sir,

That part of our army which we left in Calcutta, arrived at Barahampore, before our departure; and shortly after, the entire brigade received orders to march to Denapore,<sup>1</sup> where we arrived in the year 1775. On the Bengal establishment, there are three

brigades, who all wear the usual scarlet uniform: that of the first is faced with blue—of the second with black—and the third with yellow. Each brigade contains one regiment of Europeans, six regiments or twelve battalions of seapoys, three companies of European artillery, five companies of native artillery, called gullendas, and two companies of native cavalry. A regiment of seapoys on the present establishment consists of two battalions, each battalion 500 men or five companies, with a captain, two lieutenants, three ensigns, one serjeant-major, Europeans; besides one comedan, five subidars, ten jemidars, thirty howaldars, thirty homaldars, five tombourwallas, five basleewallas, and five troohewallas, natives.

As you may not understand those terms, I shall thus explain them to you;

Comedan signifies	<i>a captain</i>
Subidar	<i>a lieutenant</i>
Jemidar	<i>an ensign</i>
Howaldar	<i>a serjeant</i>
Homaldar	<i>a corporal</i>
Seapoy	<i>a private soldier</i>
Tombourwalla	<i>a drummer</i>
Basleewalla	<i>a fife<sup>2</sup></i>
Trooheewalla	<i>a trumpeter</i>

The seapoys are composed of Mahometans and Hindoos, who make no other distinction in their exterior appearance, than that the Hindoos color each side of the face and forehead with a kind of red paint, produced from the timber of the sandal tree. The dress of both is a thin muslin shirt, a red coat in uniform, a turban, sash, and short trousers. The turban, which is of muslin, is mostly blue as well as the sash: it is quite small, fitted very closely to the head, and not unlike a Scotch bonnet in form, except that the front is more flat, to which they affix a cockade of white muslin puffed and trimmed with silver lace, with a star in the middle. It is also ornamented with curious narrow festoons made of thin wire. Round the neck are worn

two or three rows of wooden beads, and a shield on the left shoulder. An officer wears silver or glass beads, a coat of scarlet cloth, in uniform with the brigade to which he belongs, a blue sash and turban, containing twenty yards each, a pair of long trousers, half boots, and a shield on the left shoulder.

The seapoys, who are in general well disciplined in the use of arms, serve as a strong reinforcement to a much less number of Europeans, and on many occasions display great firmness and resolution.

As a sequel to this letter, I beg leave to subjoin an alphabetical explanation of Persian and Indian terms, not commonly understood in this country.

### **From *Explanation of Persian and Indian Terms***

#### **[SOME DEFINITIONS: A SMALL ANTHOLOGY]**

Bazar	<i>a market</i>
Betel	<i>a leaf growing on a vine, and chewed by all ranks of people</i>
Bramin	<i>a priest</i>
Caffres	<i>Negroes from Africa, trained up as soldiers by the Europeans</i>
Gentoo	<i>a native Indian, in a state of idolatry</i>
Kistbundee	<i>times of the payment of the country revenues</i>
Mulna	<i>a Mahometan priest</i>
Muxadabad	<i>the capital of Bengal</i>
Nabob <sup>3</sup>	<i>a governor of a province, appointed by the Soubah</i>
Paddy	<i>rice in the husk</i>
Paddy-grounds	<i>rice fields</i>
Pagoda	<i>an Indian temple</i>

Pagoda	<i>an Indian coin worth 7s. 8d. sterling</i>
Palanquin	<i>a kind of canopy bed for travelling</i>
Raja	<i>the highest title claimed by the Gentoo princes</i>
Seapoys	<i>Indian foot soldiers, hired and disciplined by Europeans</i>
Soubah	<i>the Viceroy of the Deckan, or of Bengal</i>
Tunkahs	<i>assignments upon lands, or rents assigned to the Company</i>
Vakeel	<i>an English agent, or resident at the Nabob's court</i>
Zemindary	<i>an officer who takes care of the rents arising from the public lands</i>

## Endnotes

1794

- Note 1: The full title was *The Travels of Dean Mahomet, A native of Patna in Bengal, through several parts of India, while in the service of the honorable the East India Company*. The letters are addressed to his patron Colonel William A. Bailie. Mahomet writes from Ireland, of his time in India.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Accustomed. "Ingenuously": candidly.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, the merits of Indian men (and Indian culture more generally).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: God's care and design.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Milton's *Paradise Lost* describes paradise in Eden.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Extravagance or looseness; bad manners.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 1: Muslims.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Below, Mahomet defines Mulna, "a Mahometan priest."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Candles.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Generosity.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Inherits the whole property.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The prophet Muhammad. "Enthusiastic": used pejoratively, fanatical or overzealous.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Muhammad famously broke idols in Mecca.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Prayers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A city in what is today Saudi Arabia.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Above, surpassing.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Noun.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 1: Danapur, a city in Bihar, India. "Calcutta": today Kolkata, in West Bengal, then the center of British power in India. "Barahampore": Berhampore, another city in West Bengal.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Someone playing the wind instrument.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Also Nawab.[Return to reference 3](#)

# **JONATHAN SWIFT**

## **1667–1745**

Jonathan Swift was born of English parents in Dublin. His father, a lawyer, died seven months before he was born, and his mother and sister went to live with relations in the English Midlands. An uncle helped see Jonathan through an excellent education at preeminent institutions in Ireland, Kilkenny School and then Trinity College, Dublin. Before he could fix on a career, the troubles that followed upon James II's abdication and subsequent invasion of Ireland drove Swift along with other Anglo-Irish to England. Between 1689 and 1699 he was more or less continuously a member of the household of his kinsman Sir William Temple, an urbane, civilized man, a retired diplomat, and a friend of King William III, who took the throne in 1689. During these years Swift read widely, rather reluctantly decided on the church as a career and so took orders, and discovered his astonishing gifts as a satirist. In 1696–97 he wrote his powerful satires on corruptions in religion and learning, *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*, which were published in 1704 and reached their final form only in the fifth edition of 1710. When, at the age of thirty-two, he returned to Ireland as chaplain to the lord justice, the Earl of Berkeley, he had a clear sense of his genius.

For the rest of his life, Swift devoted his talents to politics and religion—not clearly separated at the time—and most of his works in prose were written to further a specific cause. As a clergyman, a spirited controversialist, and a devoted supporter of the Anglican

Church, he was hostile to all who seemed to threaten it: Deists, freethinkers, Roman Catholics, Nonconformists, or merely Whig politicians. In 1710 he abandoned the Whigs because he opposed their indifference to the welfare of the Anglican Church in Ireland and their desire to repeal the Test Act, which required all holders of offices of state to take the Sacrament according to the Anglican rites, thus excluding Roman Catholics and Dissenters. Welcomed by the Tories, he became the most brilliant political journalist of the day, serving the government of Oxford and Bolingbroke as editor of the party organ, the *Examiner*, and as author of its most powerful articles. He also wrote longer pamphlets in support of important policies, such as that favoring the Peace of Utrecht (1713). He was greatly valued by the two ministers, who admitted him to social intimacy, although never to their counsels. The reward of his services was not the English bishopric that he felt he deserved but the deanship of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, which came to him in 1713, a year before the death of Queen Anne and the fall of the Tories put an end to all his hopes of preferment in England.

In Ireland, where he lived unwillingly, he became not only an efficient ecclesiastical administrator but also, in 1724, the leader of Irish resistance to English oppression. Under the pseudonym "M. B. Drapier," he published the famous series of public letters that aroused the country to refuse to accept £100,000 in new copper coins (minted in England by William Wood, who had obtained his patent through court corruption), which, it was feared, would further debase the coinage of the already poverty-stricken kingdom. Although the authorship of the letters was known to all Dublin, no one could be found to earn the £300 offered by the government for information as to the identity of the drapier. Swift is still venerated in Ireland as a national hero. He earned the right to refer to himself in the epitaph that he wrote for his tomb as a vigorous defender of liberty.

His last years were less happy. Swift had suffered most of his adult life from what we now recognize as Ménière's disease, which affects the inner ear, causing dizziness, nausea, and deafness. After



1739, when he was seventy-two years old, his infirmities cut him off from his duties as dean, and from then on his social life dwindled. In 1742 guardians were appointed to administer his affairs, and his last three years were spent in gloom and lethargy. But this dark ending should not put his earlier life, so full of energy and humor, into a shadow. The writer of the satires was a man in full control of great intellectual powers.

He also had a gift for friendship. Swift was admired and loved by many of the distinguished men of his time. His friendships with Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope, John Arbuthnot, John Gay, Matthew Prior, Lord Oxford, and Lord Bolingbroke, not to mention those in his less brilliant but amiable Irish circle, bear witness to his moral integrity and social charm. He also had intense, tender, emotionally complicated relationships with women, especially Esther Johnson (whom he called "Stella" in his letters and poetry). She was the daughter of Temple's steward, and when Swift first knew her, she was little more than a child. He mentored her as she grew up and came to love her as he was to love no other person. After Temple's death she moved to Dublin, where she and Swift met constantly, but never alone. While working with the Tories in London, he wrote letters to her, later published as *The Journal to Stella* (1766), and they exchanged poems as well. Whether they were secretly married or never married—and in either case why—has been often debated. A marriage of any sort seems most unlikely; and however perplexing their relationship was to others, it seems to have satisfied them. Not even the violent passion that Swift awakened, no doubt unwittingly, in the much younger woman Esther Van Homrigh (pronounced *Van Úm-mery*)—with her pleadings and reproaches and early death—could unsettle his devotion to Stella. An enigmatic account of his relations with "Vanessa," as he called Van Homrigh, is given in his poem "Cadenus and Vanessa."

For all his involvement in public affairs, Swift seems to stand apart from his contemporaries—a striking figure among the statesmen of the time, a writer who towered above others by reason of his imagination, mordant wit, and emotional intensity. He has

been called a misanthrope, a hater of humanity, and *Gulliver's Travels* has been considered an expression of savage misanthropy. It is true that Swift proclaimed himself a misanthrope in a letter to Pope, declaring that, though he loved individuals, he hated "that animal called man" in general and offering a new definition of the species not as *animal rationale* ("a rational animal") but as merely *animal rationis capax* ("an animal *capable* of reason"). This, he declared, is the "great foundation" on which his "misanthropy" was erected. Swift was stating not his hatred of his fellow creatures but his antagonism to the current optimistic view that human nature is essentially good. To the "philanthropic" flattery that sentimentalism and Deistic rationalism were paying to human nature, Swift opposed a more ancient view: that human nature is deeply and permanently flawed and that we can do nothing with or for the human race until we recognize its moral and intellectual limitations. In his epitaph he spoke of the "fierce indignation" that had torn his heart, an indignation that found superb expression in his greatest satires. It was provoked by the constant spectacle of creatures capable of reason, and therefore of reasonable conduct, steadfastly refusing to live up to their capabilities.

Swift is a master of prose. He defined a good style as "proper words in proper places," a more complex goal, and more difficult to attain, than it may appear. Much of his writing vigorously embraces concreteness and clarity. Yet he is also a master mimic, infusing diverse tones and mannerisms into his prose as his fictions demand, from *Gulliver's* subtle flickering between credulity and wry skepticism, joined and heightened into outrage by the end of the *Travels*, to the statistically fortified deadpan of "A Modest Proposal." A love of bluntness also animates his poems, which shock us with their hard look at the facts of life and the body. It is unpoetic poetry, devoid of, indeed as often as not mocking at, inspiration, romantic love, cosmetic beauty, easily assumed literary attitudes, and conventional poetic language. Like the prose, it is predominantly satiric in purpose, but not without its moments of comedy and

lightheartedness, though most often written less to divert than to agitate the reader.

## A Description of a City Shower

Careful observers may foretell the hour  
(By sure prognostics) when to dread a shower:  
While rain depends,<sup>1</sup> the pensive cat gives o'er  
Her frolics, and pursues her tail no more.  
Returning home at night, you'll find the sink<sup>o</sup>  
5 Strike your offended sense with double stink.  
If you be wise, then go not far to dine;  
You'll spend in coach hire more than save in wine.  
A coming shower your shooting corns presage,  
Old achés throb, your hollow tooth will rage.  
10 Sauntering in coffeehouse is Dulman<sup>2</sup> seen;  
He damns the climate and complains of spleen.<sup>3</sup>  
Meanwhile the South, rising with dabbled wings,  
A sable cloud athwart the welkin flings,  
That swilled more liquor than it could contain,  
15 And, like a drunkard, gives it up again.  
Brisk Susan whips her linen from the rope,  
While the first drizzling shower is borne aslope:  
Such is that sprinkling which some careless quean<sup>o</sup>  
Flirts on you from her mop, but not so clean:  
20 You fly, invoke the gods; then turning, stop  
To rail; she singing, still whirls on her mop.  
Not yet the dust had shunned the unequal strife,  
But, aided by the wind, fought still for life,  
And wafted with its foe by violent gust,  
25 'Twas doubtful which was rain and which was dust.  
Ah! where must needy poet seek for aid,  
When dust and rain at once his coat invade?  
Sole coat, where dust cemented by the rain  
30 Erects the nap,<sup>4</sup> and leaves a mingled stain.

Now in contiguous drops the flood comes down,  
 Threatening with deluge this devoted town.  
 To shops in crowds the daggled<sup>o</sup> females fly,  
 Pretend to cheapen<sup>o</sup> goods, but nothing buy.  
 The Templar spruce, while every spout's abroad,<sup>5</sup>  
 35 Stays till 'tis fair, yet seems to call a coach.  
 The tucked-up sempstress walks with hasty strides,  
 While streams run down her oiled umbrella's sides.  
 Here various kinds, by various fortunes led,  
 Commence acquaintance underneath a shed.  
 40 Triumphant Tories and desponding Whigs  
 Forget their feuds,<sup>6</sup> and join to save their wigs.  
 Boxed in a chair<sup>o</sup> the beau impatient sits,  
 While spouts run clattering o'er the roof by fits,  
 And ever and anon with frightful din  
 45 The leather sounds;<sup>7</sup> he trembles from within.  
 So when Troy chairmen bore the wooden steed,  
 Pregnant with Greeks impatient to be freed  
 (Those bully Greeks, who, as the moderns do,  
 Instead of paying chairmen, run them through),<sup>8</sup>  
 50 Laocoön struck the outside with his spear,  
 And each imprisoned hero quaked for fear.<sup>9</sup>  
 Now from all parts the swelling kennels<sup>1</sup> flow,  
 And bear their trophies with them as they go:  
 Filth of all hues and odors seem to tell  
 55 What street they sailed from, by their sight and  
 smell.  
 They, as each torrent drives with rapid force,  
 From Smithfield or St. Pulchre's shape their course,  
 And in huge confluence joined at Snow Hill ridge,  
 Fall from the conduit prone to Holborn Bridge.<sup>2</sup>  
 60 Sweepings from butchers' stalls, dung, guts, }  
 and blood, }  
 Drowned puppies, stinking sprats,<sup>3</sup> all  
 drenched in mud,

Dead cats, and turnip tops, come tumbling down the  
flood.<sup>4</sup>

## Endnotes

1710

- Note 1: Impends, is imminent. An example of elevated diction used frequently throughout the poem.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A type name (from “dull man”), like Congreve’s “Petulant” or “Witwoud.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The English tendency to melancholy (“the spleen”) was often attributed to the rainy climate.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Stiffens the coat’s surface.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Pouring out water. “The Templar”: a young man engaged in studying law.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Whig ministry had just fallen, and the Tories, led by Harley and St. John, were forming the government with which Swift was to be closely associated until the death of the queen in 1714.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The roof of the sedan chair was made of leather.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, with their swords.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: *Aeneid* 2.40–53.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The open gutters in the middle of the street.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An accurate description of the drainage system of this part of London—the eastern edge of Holborn and West Smithfield, which lie outside the old walls west and east of Newgate. The great cattle and sheep markets were in Smithfield. The church of St. Sepulchre (“St. Pulchre’s”) stood opposite Newgate Prison. Holborn Conduit was at the foot of Snow Hill. It drained into Fleet Ditch, an evil-smelling open sewer, at Holborn Bridge.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Small herrings.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In George Faulkner’s edition of Swift’s *Works* (Dublin, 1735) a note almost certainly suggested by Swift points to the

concluding triplet, with its resonant final alexandrine, as a burlesque of a mannerism of Dryden and other Restoration poets and claims that Swift's ridicule banished the triplet from contemporary poetry.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *sewer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wench*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mud-spattered*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bargain for*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sedan chair*[Return to reference °](#)

# Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift

## *Occasioned by Reading a Maxim in Rochefoucauld*<sup>1</sup>

*Dans l'adversité de nos meilleurs amis nous trouvons  
toujours quelque chose, qui ne nous déplaît pas.*<sup>2</sup>

As Rochefoucauld his maxims drew  
From nature, I believe 'em true:  
They argue no corrupted mind  
In him; the fault is in mankind.

5       This maxim more than all the rest  
Is thought too base for human breast:  
"In all distresses of our friends  
We first consult our private ends,  
While Nature, kindly bent to ease us,  
Points out some circumstance to please us."

10       If this perhaps your patience move,<sup>o</sup>  
Let reason and experience prove.

      We all behold with envious eyes  
Our equal raised above our size.  
Who would not at a crowded show  
15       Stand high himself, keep others low?  
I love my friend as well as you,  
But why should he obstruct my view?  
Then let me have the higher post;  
I ask but for an inch at most.

20       If in a battle you should find  
One, whom you love of all mankind,  
Had some heroic action done,  
A champion killed, or trophy won;  
Rather than thus be overtopped,



25 Would you not wish his laurels cropped?  
Dear honest Ned is in the gout,  
Lies racked with pain, and you without:  
How patiently you hear him groan!  
How glad the case is not your own!  
30 What poet would not grieve to see  
His brethren write as well as he?  
But rather than they should excel,  
He'd wish his rivals all in hell.  
Her end when Emulation misses,  
35 She turns to envy, stings, and hisses:  
The strongest friendship yields to pride,  
Unless the odds be on our side.  
Vain humankind! fantastic race!  
Thy various follies who can trace?  
40 Self-love, ambition, envy, pride,  
Their empire in our hearts divide.  
Give others riches, power, and station;  
'Tis all on me an usurpation;  
I have no title to aspire,  
45 Yet, when you sink, I seem the higher.  
In Pope I cannot read a line,  
But with a sigh I wish it mine:  
When he can in one couplet fix  
More sense than I can do in six,  
50 It gives me such a jealous fit,  
I cry, "Pox take him and his wit!"  
I grieve to be outdone by Gay<sup>3</sup>  
In my own humorous biting way.  
Arbuthnot<sup>4</sup> is no more my friend,  
55 Who dares to irony pretend,  
Which I was born to introduce,  
Refined it first, and showed its use.  
St. John, as well as Pulteney,<sup>5</sup> knows  
That I had some repute for prose;  
60

And, till they drove me out of date,  
Could maul a minister of state.  
If they have mortified my pride,  
And made me throw my pen aside;  
If with such talents Heaven hath blessed 'em,  
65 Have I not reason to detest 'em?  
To all my foes, dear Fortune, send  
Thy gifts, but never to my friend:  
I tamely can endure the first,  
But this with envy makes me burst.  
70 Thus much may serve by way of proem;  
Proceed we therefore to our poem.  
The time is not remote, when I  
Must by the course of nature die;  
When, I foresee, my special friends  
75 Will try to find their private ends:  
Though it is hardly understood  
Which way my death can do them good;  
Yet thus, methinks, I hear 'em speak:  
"See how the Dean begins to break!  
80 Poor gentleman! he droops apace!  
You plainly find it in his face.  
That old vertigo<sup>6</sup> in his head  
Will never leave him till he's dead.  
Besides, his memory decays;  
85 He recollects not what he says;  
He cannot call his friends to mind;  
Forgets the place where last he dined;  
Plies you with stories o'er and o'er;  
He told them fifty times before.  
90 How does he fancy we can sit  
To hear his out-of-fashion'd wit?  
But he takes up with younger folks,  
Who for his wine will bear his jokes.  
Faith, he must make his stories shorter,  
95

Or change his comrades once a quarter;  
In half the time, he talks them round;  
There must another set be found.

100        "For poetry, he's past his prime;  
He takes an hour to find a rhyme;  
His fire is out, his wit decayed,  
His fancy sunk, his Muse a jade.<sup>7</sup>  
I'd have him throw away his pen—  
But there's no talking to some men."

105        And then their tenderness appears  
By adding largely to my years:  
"He's older than he would be reckoned,  
And well remembers Charles the Second.  
He hardly drinks a pint of wine;  
And that, I doubt, is no good sign.  
110        His stomach, too, begins to fail;  
Last year we thought him strong and hale;  
But now he's quite another thing;  
I wish he may hold out till spring."  
Then hug themselves, and reason thus:  
115        "It is not yet so bad with us."

          In such a case they talk in tropes,<sup>8</sup>  
And by their fears express their hopes.  
Some great misfortune to portend  
No enemy can match a friend.  
120        With all the kindness they profess,  
The merit of a lucky guess  
(When daily how-d'ye's come of course,  
And servants answer, "Worse and worse!")  
Would please 'em better, than to tell  
125        That God be praised! the Dean is well.  
Then he who prophesied the best,  
Approves his foresight to the rest:  
"You know I always feared the worst,  
And often told you so at first."

130

He'd rather choose that I should die,  
Than his prediction prove a lie.  
Not one foretells I shall recover,  
But all agree to give me over.

135        Yet, should some neighbor feel a pain  
Just in the parts where I complain,  
How many a message would he send?  
What hearty prayers that I should mend?  
Inquire what regimen I kept;  
140        What gave me ease, and how I slept,  
And more lament, when I was dead,  
Than all the snivelers round my bed.

      My good companions, never fear;  
For though you may mistake a year,  
Though your prognostics run too fast,  
145        They must be verified at last.

      Behold the fatal day arrive!  
"How is the Dean?"—"He's just alive."  
Now the departing prayer is read.  
"He hardly breathes"—"The Dean is dead."  
150        Before the passing bell begun,  
The news through half the town has run.  
"Oh! may we all for death prepare!  
What has he left? and who's his heir?"  
"I know no more than what the news is;  
155        'Tis all bequeathed to public uses."  
"To public use! a perfect whim!  
What had the public done for him?  
Mere envy, avarice, and pride:  
He gave it all—but first he died.  
160        And had the Dean in all the nation  
No worthy friend, no poor relation?  
So ready to do strangers good,  
Forgetting his own flesh and blood?"

165        Now Grub Street<sup>8</sup> wits are all employed;

With elegies the town is cloyed;  
 Some paragraph in every paper  
 To curse the Dean, or bless the Drapier.<sup>9</sup>  
 The doctors, tender of their fame,  
 Wisely on me lay all the blame.  
 170 "We must confess his case was nice;<sup>1</sup>  
 But he would never take advice.  
 Had he been ruled, for aught appears,  
 He might have lived these twenty years:  
 175 For, when we opened him, we found,  
 That all his vital parts were sound."  
 From Dublin soon to London spread,  
 'Tis told at court, "The Dean is dead."  
 Kind Lady Suffolk, in the spleen,<sup>2</sup>  
 Runs laughing up to tell the Queen.  
 180 The Queen, so gracious, mild and good,  
 Cries, "Is he gone? 'tis time he should.  
 He's dead, you say; why, let him rot:  
 I'm glad the medals were forgot.<sup>3</sup>  
 I promised him, I own; but when?  
 185 I only was the Princess then;  
 But now, as consort of the King,  
 You know, 'tis quite a different thing."  
 Now Chartres, at Sir Robert's<sup>4</sup> levee,<sup>o</sup>  
 Tells with a sneer the tidings heavy:  
 190 "Why, is he dead without his shoes?"  
 Cries Bob, "I'm sorry for the news:  
 Oh, were the wretch but living still,  
 And in his place my good friend Will!<sup>5</sup>  
 Or had a miter on his head,  
 195 Provided Bolingbroke were dead!"  
 Now Curll<sup>6</sup> his shop from rubbish drains:  
 Three genuine tomes of Swift's remains.  
 And then, to make them pass the glibber,  
 Revised by Tibbalds, Moore, and Cibber.<sup>7</sup>

200 He'll treat me as he does my betters,  
Publish my will, my life, my letters;  
Revive the libels born to die,  
Which Pope must bear, as well as I.

205 Here shift the scene, to represent  
How those I love, my death lament.  
Poor Pope will grieve a month, and Gay  
A week, and Arbuthnot a day.

210 St. John himself will scarce forbear  
To bite his pen, and drop a tear.  
The rest will give a shrug, and cry,  
"I'm sorry—but we all must die."

Indifference clad in wisdom's guise  
All fortitude of mind supplies:  
For how can stony bowels melt  
215 In those who never pity felt?  
When *we* are lashed, *they* kiss the rod,  
Resigning to the will of God.

The fools, my juniors by a year,  
Are tortured with suspense and fear;  
220 Who wisely thought my age a screen,  
When death approached, to stand between:  
The screen removed, their hearts are trembling;  
They mourn for me without dissembling.

225 My female friends, whose tender hearts  
Have better learned to act their parts,  
Receive the news in doleful dumps:  
"The Dean is dead (and what is trumps?)  
Then, Lord have mercy on his soul!  
(Ladies, I'll venture for the vole.)<sup>8</sup>  
230 Six deans, they say, must bear the pall.  
(I wish I knew what king to call.)  
Madam, your husband will attend  
The funeral of so good a friend?"  
"No, madam, 'tis a shocking sight;  
235

And he's engaged tomorrow night:  
My Lady Club would take it ill,  
If he should fail her at quadrille.  
He loved the Dean—I lead a heart)  
But dearest friends, they say, must part.  
240 His time was come; he ran his race;  
We hope he's in a better place."  
    Why do we grieve that friends should die?  
No loss more easy to supply.  
One year is past; a different scene;  
245 No further mention of the Dean,  
Who now, alas! no more is missed,  
Than if he never did exist.  
Where's now this favorite of Apollo?<sup>9</sup>  
Departed—and his works must follow,  
250 Must undergo the common fate;  
His kind of wit is out of date.  
    Some country squire to Lintot<sup>1</sup> goes,  
Inquires for *Swift* in verse and prose.  
Says Lintot, "I have heard the name;  
255 He died a year ago."—"The same."  
He searches all his shop in vain.  
"Sir, you may find them in Duck Lane:<sup>2</sup>  
I sent them, with a load of books,  
Last Monday to the pastry-cook's.<sup>3</sup>  
260 To fancy they could live a year!  
I find you're but a stranger here.  
The Dean was famous in his time,  
And had a kind of knack at rhyme.  
His way of writing now is past:  
265 The town has got a better taste.  
I keep no antiquated stuff;  
But spick and span I have enough.  
Pray do but give me leave to show 'em:  
Here's Colley Cibber's birthday poem.<sup>4</sup>

270 This ode you never yet have seen  
By Stephen Duck<sup>5</sup> upon the Queen.  
Then here's a letter finely penned  
Against the *Craftsman*<sup>6</sup> and his friend;  
It clearly shows that all reflection  
275 On ministers is disaffection.  
Next, here's Sir Robert's vindication,<sup>7</sup>  
And Mr. Henley's<sup>8</sup> last oration.  
The hawkers have not got 'em yet:  
Your honor please to buy a set?  
280 "Here's Woolston's<sup>9</sup> tracts, the twelfth edition;  
'Tis read by every politician:  
The country members, when in town,  
To all their boroughs send them down;  
You never met a thing so smart;  
285 The courtiers have them all by heart;  
Those maids of honor (who can read)  
Are taught to use them for their creed.  
The reverend author's good intention  
Has been rewarded with a pension.  
290 He does an honor to his gown,  
By bravely running priestcraft down;  
He shows, as sure as God's in Gloucester,<sup>1</sup>  
That Jesus was a grand impostor;  
That all his miracles were cheats,  
295 Performed as jugglers do their feats:  
The Church had never such a writer;  
A shame he hath not got a miter!"  
Suppose me dead; and then suppose  
A club assembled at the Rose;<sup>2</sup>  
300 Where, from discourse of this and that,  
I grow the subject of their chat:  
And while they toss my name about,  
With favor some, and some without,  
One, quite indifferent in the cause,



My character impartial draws:  
305 "The Dean, if we believe report,  
Was never ill received at court.  
As for his works in verse and prose,  
I own myself no judge of those;  
310 Nor can I tell what critics thought 'em:  
But this I know, all people bought 'em,  
As with a moral view designed  
To cure the vices of mankind.  
"His vein, ironically grave,  
315 Exposed the fool and lashed the knave;  
To steal a hint was never known,  
But what he writ was all his own.<sup>3</sup>  
"He never thought an honor done him,  
Because a duke was proud to own him;  
320 Would rather slip aside and choose  
To talk with wits in dirty shoes;  
Despised the fools with stars and garters,<sup>4</sup>  
So often seen caressing Chartres.  
He never courted men in station,  
325 Nor persons held in admiration;  
Of no man's greatness was afraid,  
Because he sought for no man's aid.  
Though trusted long in great affairs,  
He gave himself no haughty airs;  
330 Without regarding private ends,  
Spent all his credit for his friends;  
And only chose the wise and good;  
No flatterers, no allies in blood;  
But succored virtue in distress,  
335 And seldom failed of good success;  
As numbers in their hearts must own,  
Who, but for him, had been unknown.  
"With princes kept a due decorum,  
But never stood in awe before 'em.  
340

He followed David's lesson just;  
In princes never put thy trust:<sup>5</sup>  
And would you make him truly sour,  
Provoke him with a slave in power.  
The Irish senate if you named,  
345 With what impatience he declaimed!  
Fair Liberty was all his cry,  
For her he stood prepared to die;  
For her he boldly stood alone;  
For her he oft exposed his own.  
350 Two kingdoms, just as faction led,  
Had set a price upon his head,  
But not a traitor could be found,  
To sell him for six hundred pound.<sup>6</sup>  
"Had he but spared his tongue and pen,  
355 He might have rose like other men;  
But power was never in his thought,  
And wealth he valued not a groat:  
Ingratitude he often found,  
And pitied those who meant the wound;  
360 But kept the tenor of his mind,  
To merit well of human kind:  
Nor made a sacrifice of those  
Who still were true, to please his foes.  
He labored many a fruitless hour,  
365 To reconcile his friends in power;  
Saw mischief by a faction brewing,  
While they pursued each other's ruin.  
But, finding vain was all his care,  
He left the court in mere despair.<sup>7</sup>  
370 "And, oh! how short are human schemes!  
Here ended all our golden dreams.  
What St. John's skill in state affairs,  
What Ormonde's<sup>8</sup> valor, Oxford's cares,  
To save their sinking country lent,

375 Was all destroyed by one event.<sup>9</sup>  
Too soon that precious life was ended,  
On which alone our weal depended.  
When up a dangerous faction starts,<sup>1</sup>  
380 With wrath and vengeance in their hearts;  
By solemn League and Covenant bound,  
To ruin, slaughter, and confound;  
To turn religion to a fable,  
And make the government a Babel;  
385 Pervert the laws, disgrace the gown,  
Corrupt the senate, rob the crown;  
To sacrifice old England's glory,  
And make her infamous in story:  
When such a tempest shook the land,  
How could unguarded Virtue stand?  
390 With horror, grief, despair, the Dean  
Beheld the dire destructive scene:  
His friends in exile, or the Tower,<sup>2</sup>  
Himself within the frown of power,  
Pursued by base envenomed pens,  
395 Far to the land of slaves and fens;<sup>o</sup>  
A servile race in folly nursed,  
Who truckle most, when treated worst.  
"By innocence and resolution,  
He bore continual persecution;  
400 While numbers to preferment rose,  
Whose merits were to be his foes;  
When even his own familiar friends,  
Intent upon their private ends,  
Like renegadoes now he feels,  
405 Against him lifting up their heels.  
"The Dean did, by his pen, defeat  
An infamous destructive cheat;<sup>3</sup>  
Taught fools their interest how to know,  
And gave them arms to ward the blow.

410 Envy has owned it was his doing,  
To save that hapless land from ruin;  
While they who at the steerage<sup>4</sup> stood,  
And reaped the profit, sought his blood.

415 "To save them from their evil fate,  
In him was held a crime of state.  
A wicked monster on the bench,<sup>5</sup>  
Whose fury blood could never quench;  
As vile and profligate a villain,  
420 As modern Scroggs, or old Tresilian;<sup>6</sup>  
Who long all justice had discarded,  
Nor feared he God, nor man regarded;  
Vowed on the Dean his rage to vent,  
And make him of his zeal repent:  
425 But Heaven his innocence defends,  
The grateful people stand his friends;  
Not strains of law, nor judge's frown,  
Nor topics<sup>o</sup> brought to please the crown,  
Nor witness hired, nor jury picked,  
Prevail to bring him in convict.

430 "In exile, with a steady heart,  
He spent his life's declining part;  
Where folly, pride, and faction sway,  
Remote from St. John, Pope, and Gay.

435 "His friendships there, to few confined,  
Were always of the middling kind;  
No fools of rank, a mongrel breed,  
Who fain would pass for lords indeed:  
Where titles give no right or power,  
And peerage is a withered flower;  
440 He would have held it a disgrace,  
If such a wretch had known his face.  
On rural squires, that kingdom's bane,  
He vented oft his wrath in vain;  
445 Biennial squires<sup>7</sup> to market brought:

Who sell their souls and votes for naught;  
The nation stripped, go joyful back,  
To rob the church, their tenants rack,  
Go snacks<sup>o</sup> with rogues and rapparees;<sup>o</sup>  
And keep the peace to pick up fees;  
450 In every job to have a share,  
A jail or barrack to repair;  
And turn the tax for public roads  
Commodious to their own abodes.  
"Perhaps I may allow the Dean  
455 Had too much satire in his vein;  
And seemed determined not to starve it,  
Because no age could more deserve it.  
Yet malice never was his aim;  
He lashed the vice, but spared the name;  
460 No individual could resent,  
Where thousands equally were meant;  
His satire points at no defect,  
But what all mortals may correct;  
For he abhorred that senseless tribe  
465 Who call it humor when they gibe:  
He spared a hump, or crooked nose,  
Whose owners set not up for beaux.  
True genuine dullness moved his pity,  
Unless it offered to be witty.  
470 Those who their ignorance confessed,  
He ne'er offended with a jest;  
But laughed to hear an idiot quote  
A verse from Horace learned by rote.  
"He knew an hundred pleasant stories,  
475 With all the turns of Whigs and Tories:  
Was cheerful to his dying day;  
And friends would let him have his way.  
"He gave the little wealth he had  
480 To build a house for fools and mad;<sup>8</sup>

And showed by one satiric touch,  
No nation wanted it so much.  
That kingdom he hath left his debtor,  
I wish it soon may have a better."

1731**Endnotes**

1739

- Note 1: François de la Rochefoucauld (1613–1680), writer of witty, cynical maxims. Writing to Pope (November 26, 1725), Swift, opposing the optimistic philosophy that Pope and Bolingbroke (see *Essay on Man*, p. 565) were at that time developing, professed to have founded his whole character on these maxims.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In the misfortune of our best friends we always find something that does not displease us (French).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The author of *The Beggar's Opera* and an intimate friend of Swift and Pope. His *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716) owes something to Swift's "City Shower."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A physician and wit, friend of Swift and Pope (see Pope's *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, p. 574).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke (see headnote to *An Essay on Man*, p. 566), though debarred from the House of Lords and from public office, had become the center of a group of Tories and discontented young Whigs (of whom William Pulteney was one) who united in opposing Sir Robert Walpole, the chief minister. They published a political periodical, the *Craftsman*, thus rivaling Swift in his role of political pamphleteer and enemy of Sir Robert.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Johnson in his *Dictionary* authorizes Swift's pronunciation: *ver-ti-go*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A worn-out horse, in contrast to Pegasus, the winged horse of Greek mythology, emblem of poetic inspiration.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Originally a street in London largely inhabited by hack writers; later, a generic term applied to all such writers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: It was in the character of M. B., a Dublin drapier, that Swift aroused the Irish people to resistance against the importation of Wood's halfpence.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Delicate; hence demanding careful diagnosis and treatment.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In low spirits. The phrase is ironic, as "laughing" (line 180) makes clear. Lady Suffolk was George II's mistress, with whom Swift became friendly during his visit to Pope in 1726.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Queen Caroline had promised Swift some medals when she was princess of Wales during the same year.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sir Robert Walpole. Colonel Francis Chartres was a debauchee, often satirized by Pope.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: William Pulteney (see p. 367, n. 5).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Edmund Curll, shrewd and disreputable bookseller, published pirated works, scandalous biographies, and works falsely ascribed to notable writers of the time.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Colley Cibber (1671–1757), comic actor, playwright, and supremely untalented poet laureate. He succeeded Theobald as king of the Dunces in Pope's *The Dunciad* of 1743. "Tibbalds": Lewis Theobald (1688–1744), Shakespeare scholar and editor, already enthroned as king of the Dunces in *The Dunciad* of 1728. Like Pope, Swift spells the name phonetically. "Moore": James Moore Smythe, poetaster and playwright, an enemy of Pope.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The equivalent in the card game quadrille of bidding a grand slam in bridge.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Poet who is inspired by the god of poetry (Apollo).[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Bernard Lintot, a bookseller and the publisher of Pope's Homer and some of his early poems.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: London street where secondhand books and publishers' remainders were sold.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: To be used as waste paper for lining baking dishes and wrapping parcels.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The laureate Cibber was obliged to celebrate each of the king's birthdays with a poem.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "The Thresher Poet," an agricultural laborer whose verse brought him to the notice and patronage of Queen Caroline.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See p. 367, n. 5.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Walpole hires a string of party scribblers who do nothing else but write in his defense [Swift's note].[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "Orator" John Henley, an Independent preacher who dazzled unlearned audiences with his oratory and who wrote treatises on elocution.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Thomas Woolston (1670–1733), a Cambridge scholar (hence wearing a "gown" in line 291) whose *Discourses on the Miracles of Our Saviour* had recently earned him notoriety.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Proverbially, Gloucestershire was full of monks.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A fashionable tavern in Covent Garden.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A near exact copy of line 30 of John Denham's "On Mr. Abraham Cowley" (1667): "Yet what he wrote was all his own."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Emblems of knighthood.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Psalms 146:3.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In 1714 the government offered £300 for the discovery of the author of Swift's "Public Spirit of the Whigs," and in 1724 the Irish government offered a similar amount for the discovery of the author of the fourth of Swift's *Drapier's Letters*.[Return to reference 6](#)



- Note 7: The antagonism between the two chief ministers (his dear friends), Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, and Bolingbroke, paralyzed the Tory ministry in the crucial last months of Queen Anne's life and drove Swift to retirement in Ireland, whence he returned in 1714 to make a final effort to heal the breach and save the government, which failed.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: James Butler, Duke of Ormond, who succeeded to the command of the English armies on the Continent when, in 1711, the Duke of Marlborough was stripped of his offices by Anne. He went into exile in 1714 and was active in Jacobite intrigue.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The death of Queen Anne.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Swift feared the policies of the "dangerous faction" (the Whig Party) because its toleration of Dissenters threatened the Church of England.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Bolingbroke was in exile. Oxford was sent to the Tower of London by the Whigs.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The scheme to introduce Wood's copper halfpence into Ireland in 1723–24.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Literally, the steering of a ship. Here the direction and management of public affairs in Ireland.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: William Whitshed, lord chief justice of the King's Bench of Ireland. In 1720, when the jury refused to find Swift's anonymous pamphlet "Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture" wicked and seditious, Whitshed sent them back nine times, hoping to force them to another verdict. In 1724 he presided over the trial of Harding, the printer of the fourth of Swift's *Drapier's Letters*, but again was unable, despite bullying, to force a verdict of guilty.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In 1381, Sir Robert Tresilian punished with great severity men who had participated in the Peasants' Revolt; he was impeached and in 1387 was hanged. Sir William Scroggs, lord chief justice of England at the time of the Popish Plot, 1678 (see Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, p. 35), was impeached for his misdemeanors in office in 1680.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Members of the Irish Parliament.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Swift left funds to endow a hospital for the insane. [Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *should agitate* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *figures of speech* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *morning reception* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Ireland* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *arguments* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shares* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *highwaymen* [Return to reference °](#)

## **Gulliver's Travels**

*Gulliver's Travels* is Swift's most enduring satire. Although full of allusions to recent and current events, it still rings true today, for its objects are human failings and the defective political, economic, and social institutions that they call into being. Swift adopts an ancient satirical device: the imaginary voyage. Lemuel Gulliver, the narrator, is a ship's surgeon, a moderately well educated man, kindly, resourceful, cheerful, inquiring, patriotic, truthful, and rather unimaginative—in short, a reasonably decent example of humanity, with whom a reader can readily identify. He undertakes four voyages, all of which end disastrously among “several remote nations of the world.” In the first, Gulliver is shipwrecked in the empire of Lilliput, where he finds himself a giant among a diminutive people, charmed by their miniature city and amused by their toylike prettiness. But in the end they prove to be treacherous, malicious, ambitious, vengeful, and cruel. As we read we grow disenchanted with the inhabitants of this fanciful kingdom, and then gradually we begin to recognize our likeness to them, especially in the disproportion between our natural pettiness and our boundless and destructive passions. In the second voyage, Gulliver is abandoned by his shipmates in Brobdingnag, a land of giants, creatures ten times as large as Europeans. Though he fears that such monsters must be brutes, the reverse proves to be the case. Brobdingnag is something of a utopia, governed by a humane and enlightened prince who is the embodiment of moral and political wisdom. In the long interview in which Gulliver pridefully enlarges on the glories of England and its political institutions, the king reduces him to resentful silence by asking questions that reveal the difference between what England is and what it ought to be. In Brobdingnag, Gulliver finds himself a Lilliputian, his pride humbled by his helpless state and his human vanity diminished by the realization that his body must have seemed as disgusting to the Lilliputians as do the bodies of the Brobdingnagians to him.

Part 3 differs from the other parts of the *Travels*, each of which describes a single, distinct society that challenges Gulliver's sense of

his own humanity by landing him among bodies very different from his. In Part 3, Gulliver instead visits many places—Laputa, Balnibarbi, Glubbdbudrib, Luggnagg, and (jarringly adding a real nation to the fantastic itinerary) Japan—and the inhabitants all at least look like normal human beings. This allows Swift to mock a variety of targets, including extremes of abstract reasoning in science, politics, and economics as well as commonly received ideas about history and human happiness. The final voyage sets Gulliver between a race of horses, Houyhnhnms (pronounced *Hwín-ims*), who live entirely by reason except for a few well-controlled and muted social affections, and the Yahoos, whom they enslave, whose bodies are obscene caricatures of the human body and who have no glimmer of reason but are mere creatures of appetite and passion.

When *Gulliver's Travels* first appeared, everyone read it—children for the story and politicians for the satire of current affairs—and ever since it has retained a hold on readers of every kind. Almost unique in world literature, it is simple enough for children, complex enough to carry adults beyond their depth. Swift's art works on many levels. First of all, there is the sheer playfulness of the narrative. Through Gulliver's eyes, we gaze on marvel after marvel: a tiny girl who threads an invisible needle with invisible silk or a white mare who threads a needle between pastern and hoof. The travels, like a fairy story, transport us to imaginary worlds that function with a perfect, fantastic logic different from our own; Swift exercises our sense of vision. But beyond that, he exercises our perceptions of meaning. In *Gulliver's Travels*, things are seldom what they seem; irony, probing or corrosive, underlies almost every word. In the last chapter, Gulliver insists that the example of the Houyhnhnms has made him incapable of telling a lie—but the oath he swears is quoted from Sinon, whose lies to the Trojans persuaded them to accept the Trojan *horse*. Swift trains us to read alertly, to look beneath the surface. Yet on its deepest level, the book does not offer final meanings, but a question: What is a human being? Voyaging through imaginary worlds, we try to find ourselves. Are we prideful insects or lords of creation? brutes or reasonable beings? In the last

voyage, Swift pushes such questions, and Gulliver himself, almost beyond endurance; hating his own humanity, Gulliver forgets who he is. For the reader, however, the outcome cannot be so clear. Swift does not set out to satisfy our minds but to vex and unsettle them. And he leaves us at the moment when the mixed face of humanity—the pettiness of the Lilliputians, the savagery of the Yahoos, the innocence of Gulliver himself—begins to look strangely familiar, like our own faces in a mirror.

Swift's full title for this work was *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of several Ships*. The first (1726) edition and most subsequent ones included maps of the lands Gulliver visited (reproduced here), which traced known coastlines as rendered by popular contemporary cartographer Herman Moll (mentioned in Part 4, chap. 11) and then added the fanciful lands described in the text. The *Travels* was initially published anonymously, and Swift's friends Charles Ford, Pope, and others helped him get it into print. But they or the bookseller altered and omitted so much of the original manuscript (because of its dangerous political implications) that Swift was seriously annoyed. When, in 1735, the Dublin bookseller George Faulkner brought out an edition of Swift's works, the dean seems to have taken pains, surreptitiously, to see that a more authentic version of the work was published. This text is the basis of modern editions.

# ***From Gulliver's Travels***

## ***A Letter from Captain Gulliver to His Cousin Sympson***<sup>1</sup>

I hope you will be ready to own publicly, whenever you shall be called to it, that by your great and frequent urgency you prevailed on me to publish a very loose and uncorrect account of my travels; with direction to hire some young gentlemen of either University to put them in order, and correct the style, as my Cousin Dampier<sup>2</sup> did by my advice, in his book called *A Voyage round the World*. But I do not remember I gave you power to consent that anything should be omitted, and much less that anything should be inserted: therefore, as to the latter, I do here renounce everything of that kind; particularly a paragraph about her Majesty the late Queen Anne, of most pious and glorious memory; although I did reverence and esteem her more than any of human species. But you, or your interpolator, ought to have considered that as it was not my inclination, so was it not decent to praise any animal of our composition before my master Houyhnhnm; and besides, the fact was altogether false; for to my knowledge, being in England during some part of her Majesty's reign, she did govern by a chief Minister; nay, even by two successively; the first whereof was the Lord of Godolphin, and the second the Lord of Oxford; so that you have made me *say the thing that was not*. Likewise, in the account of the Academy of Projectors, and several passages of my discourse to my master Houyhnhnm, you have either omitted some material circumstances, or minced or changed them in such a manner, that I do hardly know mine own work. When I formerly hinted to you something of this in a letter, you were pleased to answer that you were afraid of giving offense; that people in power were very watchful over the press; and apt not only to interpret, but to punish everything which looked like an *innuendo* (as I think you called it). But pray, how could that which I spoke so many years ago, and at

above five thousand leagues distance, in another reign, be applied to any of the Yahoos, who now are said to govern the herd; especially, at a time when I little thought on or feared the unhappiness of living under them. Have not I the most reason to complain, when I see these very Yahoos carried by Houyhnhnms in a vehicle, as if these were brutes, and those the rational creatures? And, indeed, to avoid so monstrous and detestable a sight was one principal motive of my retirement hither.<sup>3</sup>

Thus much I thought proper to tell you in relation to yourself, and to the trust I reposed in you.

I do in the next place complain of my own great want of judgment, in being prevailed upon by the intreaties and false reasonings of you and some others, very much against mine own opinion, to suffer my travels to be published. Pray bring to your mind how often I desired you to consider, when you insisted on the motive of public good, that the Yahoos were a species of animals utterly incapable of amendment by precepts or examples; and so it hath proved; for instead of seeing a full stop put to all abuses and corruptions, at least in this little island, as I had reason to expect, behold, after above six months warning, I cannot learn that my book hath produced one single effect according to mine intentions; I desired you would let me know by a letter, when party and faction were extinguished; judges learned and upright; pleaders honest and modest, with some tincture of common sense; and Smithfield<sup>4</sup> blazing with pyramids of law books; the young nobility's education entirely changed; the physicians banished; the female Yahoos abounding in virtue, honor, truth, and good sense; courts and levees of great ministers thoroughly weeded and swept; wit, merit, and learning rewarded; all disgracers of the press in prose and verse, condemned to eat nothing but their own cotton,<sup>5</sup> and quench their thirst with their own ink. These, and a thousand other reformatations, I firmly counted upon by your encouragement; as indeed they were plainly deducible from the precepts delivered in my book. And, it must be owned that seven months were a sufficient time to correct every vice and folly to which Yahoos are subject; if their natures had

been capable of the least disposition to virtue or wisdom; yet so far have you been from answering mine expectation in any of your letters, that on the contrary, you are loading our carrier every week with libels, and keys, and reflections, and memoirs, and second parts; wherein I see myself accused of reflecting upon great statesfolk; of degrading human nature (for so they have still the confidence to style it) and of abusing the female sex. I find likewise, that the writers of those bundles are not agreed among themselves; for some of them will not allow me to be author of mine own travels; and others make me author of books to which I am wholly a stranger.

I find likewise that your printer hath been so careless as to confound the times, and mistake the dates of my several voyages and returns; neither assigning the true year, or the true month, or day of the month; and I hear the original manuscript is all destroyed, since the publication of my book. Neither have I any copy left; however, I have sent you some corrections, which you may insert, if ever there should be a second edition; and yet I cannot stand to them, but shall leave that matter to my judicious and candid readers, to adjust it as they please.

I hear some of our sea Yahoos find fault with my sea language, as not proper in many parts, nor now in use. I cannot help it. In my first voyages, while I was young, I was instructed by the oldest mariners, and learned to speak as they did. But I have since found that the sea Yahoos are apt, like the land ones, to become new fangled in their words; which the latter change every year; insomuch, as I remember upon each return to mine own country, their old dialect was so altered, that I could hardly understand the new. And I observe, when any Yahoo comes from London out of curiosity to visit me at mine own house, we neither of us are able to deliver our conceptions in a manner intelligible to the other.<sup>6</sup>

If the censure of Yahoos could any way affect me, I should have great reason to complain that some of them are so bold as to think my book of travels a mere fiction out of mine own brain; and have



gone so far as to drop hints that the Houyhnhnms, and Yahoos have no more existence than the inhabitants of Utopia.

Indeed I must confess that as to the people of Lilliput, Brobdingrag (for so the word should have been spelled, and not erroneously Brobdingnag) and Laputa, I have never yet heard of any Yahoo so presumptuous as to dispute their being, or the facts I have related concerning them; because the truth immediately strikes every reader with conviction. And, is there less probability in my account of the Houyhnhnms or Yahoos, when it is manifest as to the latter, there are so many thousands even in this city, who only differ from their brother brutes in Houyhnhnmland, because they use a sort of a jabber, and do not go naked. I wrote for their amendment, and not their approbation. The united praise of the whole race would be of less consequence to me, than the neighing of those two degenerate Houyhnhnms I keep in my stable; because, from these, degenerate as they are, I still improve in some virtues, without any mixture of vice.

Do these miserable animals presume to think that I am so far degenerated as to defend my veracity; Yahoo as I am, it is well known through all Houyhnhnmland, that by the instructions and example of my illustrious master, I was able in the compass of two years (although I confess with the utmost difficulty) to remove that infernal habit of lying, shuffling, deceiving, and equivocating, so deeply rooted in the very souls of all my species; especially the Europeans.

I have other complaints to make upon this vexatious occasion; but I forbear troubling myself or you any further. I must freely confess that since my last return, some corruptions of my Yahoo nature have revived in me by conversing with a few of your species, and particularly those of mine own family, by an unavoidable necessity; else I should never have attempted so absurd a project as that of reforming the Yahoo race in this kingdom; but I have now done with all such visionary schemes for ever.

- Note 1: In this letter, first published in 1735, Swift complains, among other matters, of the alterations in his original text made by the publisher, Benjamin Motte, in the interest of what he considered political discretion.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: William Dampier (1652–1715), the explorer, whose account of his circumnavigation of the globe Swift had read.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: To Nottinghamshire.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A part of London containing many bookshops. “Pleaders”: lawyers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Presumably their paper. “Levees”: morning receptions.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Swift was the inveterate enemy of slang.[Return to reference 6](#)

### ***The Publisher to the Reader***

The author of these travels, Mr. Lemuel Gulliver, is my ancient and intimate friend; there is likewise some relation between us by the mother's side. About three years ago Mr. Gulliver, growing weary of the concourse of curious people coming to him at his house in Redriff,<sup>7</sup> made a small purchase of land, with a convenient house, near Newark, in Nottinghamshire, his native country; where he now lives retired, yet in good esteem among his neighbors.

Although Mr. Gulliver were born in Nottinghamshire, where his father dwelt, yet I have heard him say his family came from Oxfordshire; to confirm which, I have observed in the churchyard at Banbury, in that county, several tombs and monuments of the Gullivers.

Before he quitted Redriff, he left the custody of the following papers in my hands, with the liberty to dispose of them as I should think fit. I have carefully perused them three times; the style is very plain and simple; and the only fault I find is that the author, after the manner of travelers, is a little too circumstantial. There is an air of truth apparent through the whole; and indeed the author was so distinguished for his veracity, that it became a sort of proverb among his neighbors at Redriff, when anyone affirmed a thing, to say, it was as true as if Mr. Gulliver had spoke it.

By the advice of several worthy persons, to whom, with the author's permission, I communicated these papers, I now venture to send them into the world; hoping they may be, at least for some time, a better entertainment to our young noblemen, than the common scribbles of politics and party.

This volume would have been at least twice as large, if I had not made bold to strike out innumerable passages relating to the winds and tides, as well as to the variations and bearings in the several voyages; together with the minute descriptions of the management of the ship in storms, in the style of sailors; likewise the account of the longitudes and latitudes, wherein I have reason to apprehend that Mr. Gulliver may be a little dissatisfied; but I was resolved to fit

the work as much as possible to the general capacity of readers. However, if my own ignorance in sea affairs shall have led me to commit some mistakes, I alone am answerable for them; and if any traveler hath a curiosity to see the whole work at large, as it came from the hand of the author, I will be ready to gratify him.

As for any further particulars relating to the author, the reader will receive satisfaction from the first pages of the book.

RICHARD SYMPSON

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Rotherhithe, a district in southern London, below Tower Bridge, then frequented by sailors.[Return to reference 7](#)

## ***Part 1. A Voyage to Lilliput***

CHAPTER 1. *The author gives some account of himself and family; his first inducements to travel. He is shipwrecked, and swims for his life; gets safe on shore in the country of Lilliput; is made a prisoner, and carried up the country.*

My father had a small estate in Nottinghamshire; I was the third of five sons. He sent me to Emanuel College in Cambridge, at fourteen years old, where I resided three years, and applied myself close to my studies: but the charge of maintaining me (although I had a very scanty allowance) being too great for a narrow fortune, I was bound apprentice to Mr. James Bates, an eminent surgeon in London, with whom I continued four years; and my father now and then sending me small sums of money, I laid them out in learning navigation, and other parts of the mathematics, useful to those who intend to travel, as I always believed it would be some time or other my fortune to do. When I left Mr. Bates, I went down to my father; where, by the assistance of him and my uncle John, and some other relations, I got forty pounds, and a promise of thirty pounds a year to maintain me at Leyden:<sup>8</sup> there I studied physic two years and seven months, knowing it would be useful in long voyages.

Soon after my return from Leyden, I was recommended by my good master Mr. Bates, to be surgeon to the *Swallow*, Captain Abraham Pannell commander; with whom I continued three years and a half, making a voyage or two into the Levant<sup>9</sup> and some other parts. When I came back, I resolved to settle in London, to which Mr. Bates, my master, encouraged me; and by him I was recommended to several patients. I took part of a small house in the Old Jury; and being advised to alter my condition, I married Mrs.<sup>1</sup> Mary Burton, second daughter to Mr. Edmond Burton, hosier, in Newgate Street, with whom I received four hundred pounds for a portion.

But, my good master Bates dying in two years after, and I having few friends, my business began to fail; for my conscience would not suffer me to imitate the bad practice of too many among my brethren. Having therefore consulted with my wife, and some of my acquaintance, I determined to go again to sea. I was surgeon

successively in two ships, and made several voyages, for six years, to the East and West Indies; by which I got some addition to my fortune. My hours of leisure I spent in reading the best authors, ancient and modern, being always provided with a good number of books; and when I was ashore, in observing the manners and dispositions of the people, as well as learning their language; wherein I had a great facility by the strength of my memory.

Plate I. Part I. Page 1.

Hoga I.

P. Mintoan

I. Good Fortune

I. Nafasow

SUNDA I.

Sillabar

*Sunda Straits*



Mildendo

Blefuscu

Lilliput

Discover'd A.D. 1699



Dimen's Land



---

The last of these voyages not proving very fortunate, I grew weary of the sea, and intended to stay at home with my wife and family. I removed from the Old Jury to Fetter Lane, and from thence to Wapping, hoping to get business among the sailors; but it would not turn to account. After three years' expectation that things would mend, I accepted an advantageous offer from Captain William Prichard, master of the *Antelope*, who was making a voyage to the South Sea. We set sail from Bristol, May 4th, 1699, and our voyage at first was very prosperous.

It would not be proper, for some reasons, to trouble the reader with the particulars of our adventures in those seas: let it suffice to inform him, that in our passage from thence to the East Indies we were driven by a violent storm to the northwest of Van Diemen's Land.<sup>2</sup> By an observation, we found ourselves in the latitude of 30 degrees 2 minutes south. Twelve of our crew were dead by immoderate labor, and ill food, the rest were in a very weak condition. On the fifth of November, which was the beginning of summer in those parts, the weather being very hazy, the seamen spied a rock, within half a cable's length<sup>3</sup> of the ship; but the wind was so strong, that we were driven directly upon it, and immediately split. Six of the crew, of whom I was one, having let down the boat into the sea, made a shift to get clear of the ship, and the rock. We rowed by my computation about three leagues, till we were able to work no longer, being already spent with labor while we were in the ship. We therefore trusted ourselves to the mercy of the waves; and in about half an hour the boat was upset by a sudden flurry from the north. What became of my companions in the boat, as well as of those who escaped on the rock, or were left in the vessel, I cannot tell; but conclude they were all lost. For my own part, I swam as fortune directed me, and was pushed forward by wind and tide. I often let my legs drop, and could feel no bottom; but when I was almost gone, and able to struggle no longer, I found myself within my depth; and by this time the storm was much abated. The declivity was so small, that I walked near a mile before I got to the shore, which I conjectured was about eight o'clock in the evening. I

then advanced forward near half a mile, but could not discover any sign of houses or inhabitants; at least I was in so weak a condition, that I did not observe them. I was extremely tired, and with that, and the heat of the weather, and about half a pint of brandy that I drank as I left the ship, I found myself much inclined to sleep. I lay down on the grass, which was very short and soft, where I slept sounder than ever I remember to have done in my life, and as I reckoned, above nine hours; for when I awaked, it was just daylight. I attempted to rise, but was not able to stir: for as I happened to lie on my back, I found my arms and legs were strongly fastened on each side to the ground; and my hair, which was long and thick, tied down in the same manner. I likewise felt several slender ligatures across my body, from my armpits to my thighs. I could only look upwards; the sun began to grow hot, and the light offended my eyes. I heard a confused noise about me, but in the posture I lay, could see nothing except the sky. In a little time I felt something alive moving on my left leg, which advancing gently forward over my breast, came almost up to my chin; when bending my eyes downwards as much as I could, I perceived it to be a human creature not six inches high,<sup>4</sup> with a bow and arrow in his hands, and a quiver at his back. In the meantime, I felt at least forty more of the same kind (as I conjectured) following the first. I was in the utmost astonishment, and roared so loud, that they all ran back in a fright; and some of them, as I was afterwards told, were hurt with the falls they got by leaping from my sides upon the ground. However, they soon returned; and one of them, who ventured so far as to get a full sight of my face, lifting up his hands and eyes by way of admiration,<sup>5</sup> cried out in a shrill, but distinct voice, *Hekinah Degul*: the others repeated the same words several times, but I then knew not what they meant. I lay all this while, as the reader may believe, in great uneasiness; at length, struggling to get loose, I had the fortune to break the strings, and wrench out the pegs that fastened my left arm to the ground; for, by lifting it up to my face, I discovered the methods they had taken to bind me; and, at the same time, with a violent pull, which gave me excessive pain, I a little loosened the

strings that tied down my hair on the left side; so that I was just able to turn my head about two inches. But the creatures ran off a second time, before I could seize them; whereupon there was a great shout in a very shrill accent; and after it ceased, I heard one of them cry aloud, *Tolgo phonac*; when in an instant I felt above an hundred arrows discharged on my left hand, which pricked me like so many needles; and besides they shot another flight into the air, as we do bombs in Europe, whereof many, I suppose, fell on my body (though I felt them not) and some on my face, which I immediately covered with my left hand. When this shower of arrows was over, I felt a groaning with grief and pain; and then striving again to get loose, they discharged another volley larger than the first, and some of them attempted with spears to stick me in the sides; but, by good luck, I had on me a buff jerkin,<sup>6</sup> which they could not pierce. I thought it the most prudent method to lie still; and my design was to continue so till night, when, my left hand being already loose, I could easily free myself: and as for the inhabitants, I had reason to believe I might be a match for the greatest armies they could bring against me, if they were all of the same size with him that I saw. But fortune disposed otherwise of me. When the people observed I was quiet, they discharged no more arrows: but by the noise increasing, I knew their numbers were greater; and about four yards from me, over-against my right ear, I heard a knocking for above an hour, like people at work; when turning my head that way, as well as the pegs and strings would permit me, I saw a stage erected about a foot and a half from the ground, capable of holding four of the inhabitants, with two or three ladders to mount it: from whence one of them, who seemed to be a person of quality, made me a long speech, whereof I understood not one syllable. But I should have mentioned, that before the principal person began his oration, he cried out three times, *Langro Dehul san*: (these words and the former were afterwards repeated and explained to me). Whereupon immediately about fifty of the inhabitants came, and cut the strings that fastened the left side of my head, which gave me the liberty of turning it to the right, and of observing the person and gesture of him who was to speak. He appeared to be of a middle age, and taller than any of

the other three who attended him; whereof one was a page who held up his train, and seemed to be somewhat longer than my middle finger; the other two stood one on each side to support him. He acted every part of an orator, and I could observe many periods<sup>2</sup> of threatenings, and others of promises, pity and kindness. I answered in a few words, but in the most submissive manner, lifting up my left hand and both my eyes to the sun, as calling him for a witness; and being almost famished with hunger, having not eaten a morsel for some hours before I left the ship, I found the demands of nature so strong upon me, that I could not forbear showing my impatience (perhaps against the strict rules of decency) by putting my finger frequently on my mouth, to signify that I wanted food. The *Hurgo* (for so they call a great lord, as I afterwards learned) understood me very well. He descended from the stage, and commanded that several ladders should be applied to my sides, on which above an hundred of the inhabitants mounted, and walked towards my mouth, laden with baskets full of meat, which had been provided and sent thither by the King's orders upon the first intelligence he received of me. I observed there was the flesh of several animals, but could not distinguish them by the taste. There were shoulders, legs, and loins shaped like those of mutton, and very well dressed, but smaller than the wings of a lark. I eat them by two or three at a mouthful, and took three loaves at a time, about the bigness of musket bullets. They supplied me as fast as they could, showing a thousand marks of wonder and astonishment at my bulk and appetite. I then made another sign that I wanted drink. They found by my eating that a small quantity would not suffice me; and being a most ingenious people, they slung up with great dexterity one of their largest hogsheads; then rolled it towards my hand, and beat out the top; I drank it off at a draught, which I might well do, for it hardly held half a pint, and tasted like a small wine of Burgundy, but much more delicious. They brought me a second hogshead, which I drank in the same manner, and made signs for more, but they had none to give me. When I had performed these wonders, they shouted for joy, and danced upon my breast, repeating several times as they did at first, *Hekinah Degul*. They

made me a sign that I should throw down the two hogsheads, but first warned the people below to stand out of the way, crying aloud, *Borach Mivola*, and when they saw the vessels in the air, there was an universal shout of *Hekinah Degul*. I confess I was often tempted, while they were passing backwards and forwards on my body, to seize forty or fifty of the first that came in my reach, and dash them against the ground. But the remembrance of what I had felt, which probably might not be the worst they could do; and the promise of honor I made them, for so I interpreted my submissive behavior, soon drove out those imaginations. Besides, I now considered myself as bound by the laws of hospitality to a people who had treated me with so much expense and magnificence. However, in my thoughts I could not sufficiently wonder at the intrepidity of these diminutive mortals, who durst venture to mount and walk on my body, while one of my hands was at liberty, without trembling at the very sight of so prodigious a creature as I must appear to them. After some time, when they observed that I made no more demands for meat, there appeared before me a person of high rank from his Imperial Majesty. His Excellency, having mounted on the small of my right leg, advanced forwards up to my face, with about a dozen of his retinue. And producing his credentials under the Signet Royal, which he applied<sup>8</sup> close to my eyes, spoke about ten minutes, without any signs of anger, but with a kind of determinate resolution; often pointing forwards, which, as I afterwards found, was towards the capital city, about half a mile distant, whither it was agreed by his Majesty in council that I must be conveyed. I answered in a few words, but to no purpose, and made a sign with my hand that was loose, putting it to the other (but over his Excellency's head, for fear of hurting him or his train) and then to my own head and body, to signify that I desired my liberty. It appeared that he understood me well enough; for he shook his head by way of disapprobation, and held his hand in a posture to show that I must be carried as a prisoner. However, he made other signs to let me understand that I should have meat and drink enough, and very good treatment. Whereupon I once more thought of attempting to break my bonds; but again, when I felt the smart of their arrows upon my face and

hands, which were all in blisters, and many of the darts still sticking in them; and observing likewise that the number of my enemies increased; I gave tokens to let them know that they might do with me what they pleased. Upon this the *Hurgo* and his train withdrew, with much civility and cheerful countenances. Soon after I heard a general shout, with frequent repetitions of the words, *Peplom Selan*, and I felt great numbers of the people on my left side relaxing the cords to such a degree, that I was able to turn upon my right, and to ease myself with making water; which I very plentifully did, to the great astonishment of the people, who conjecturing by my motions what I was going to do, immediately opened to the right and left on that side, to avoid the torrent which fell with such noise and violence from me. But before this, they had daubed my face and both my hands with a sort of ointment very pleasant to the smell, which in a few minutes removed all the smart of their arrows. These circumstances, added to the refreshment I had received by their victuals and drink, which were very nourishing, disposed me to sleep. I slept about eight hours, as I was afterwards assured; and it was no wonder; for the physicians, by the Emperor's order, had mingled a sleeping potion in the hogsheads of wine.

It seems that upon the first moment I was discovered sleeping on the ground after my landing, the Emperor had early notice of it by an express; and determined in council that I should be tied in the manner I have related (which was done in the night while I slept), that plenty of meat and drink should be sent me, and a machine prepared to carry me to the capital city.

This resolution perhaps may appear very bold and dangerous, and I am confident would not be imitated by any prince in Europe on the like occasion; however, in my opinion it was extremely prudent as well as generous. For supposing these people had endeavored to kill me with their spears and arrows while I was asleep; I should certainly have awaked with the first sense of smart, which might so far have roused my rage and strength, as to enable me to break the strings wherewith I was tied; after which, as they were not able to make resistance, so they could expect no mercy.

These people are most excellent mathematicians, and arrived to a great perfection in mechanics by the countenance and encouragement of the Emperor, who is a renowned patron of learning. This prince hath several machines fixed on wheels, for the carriage of trees and other great weights. He often builds his largest men of war, whereof some are nine foot long, in the woods where the timber grows, and has them carried on these engines<sup>9</sup> three or four hundred yards to the sea. Five hundred carpenters and engineers were immediately set at work to prepare the greatest engine they had. It was a frame of wood raised three inches from the ground, about seven foot long and four wide, moving upon twenty-two wheels. The shout I heard was upon the arrival of this engine, which it seems set out in four hours after my landing. It was brought parallel to me as I lay. But the principal difficulty was to raise and place me in this vehicle. Eighty poles, each of one foot high, were erected for this purpose, and very strong cords of the bigness of packthread were fastened by hooks to many bandages, which the workmen had girt round my neck, my hands, my body, and my legs. Nine hundred of the strongest men were employed to draw up these cords by many pulleys fastened on the poles; and thus, in less than three hours, I was raised and slung into the engine, and there tied fast. All this I was told, for while the whole operation was performing, I lay in a profound sleep, by the force of that soporiferous<sup>1</sup> medicine infused into my liquor. Fifteen hundred of the Emperor's largest horses, each about four inches and a half high, were employed to draw me towards the metropolis, which, as I said, was half a mile distant.

About four hours after we began our journey, I awaked by a very ridiculous accident; for, the carriage being stopped a while to adjust something that was out of order, two or three of the young natives had the curiosity to see how I looked when I was asleep; they climbed up into the engine, and advancing very softly to my face, one of them, an officer in the guards, put the sharp end of his half-pike a good way up into my left nostril, which tickled my nose like a straw, and made me sneeze violently: whereupon they stole off



unperceived, and it was three weeks before I knew the cause of my awaking so suddenly. We made a long march the remaining part of the day, and rested at night with five hundred guards on each side of me half with torches, and half with bows and arrows, ready to shoot me if I should offer to stir. The next morning at sunrise we continued our march, and arrived within two hundred yards of the city gates about noon. The Emperor and all his court came out to meet us, but his great officers would by no means suffer his Majesty to endanger his person by mounting on my body.

At the place where the carriage stopped, there stood an ancient temple, esteemed to be the largest in the whole kingdom, which having been polluted some years before by an unnatural murder,<sup>2</sup> was, according to the zeal of those people, looked on as profane, and therefore had been applied to common use, and all the ornaments and furniture carried away. In this edifice it was determined I should lodge. The great gate fronting to the north was about four foot high, and almost two foot wide, through which I could easily creep. On each side of the gate was a small window not above six inches from the ground: into that on the left side, the King's smiths conveyed fourscore and eleven chains, like those that hang to a lady's watch in Europe, and almost as large, which were locked to my left leg with six and thirty padlocks. Over against this temple, on the other side of the great highway, at twenty foot distance, there was a turret at least five foot high. Here the Emperor ascended with many principal lords of his court, to have an opportunity of viewing me, as I was told, for I could not see them. It was reckoned that above an hundred thousand inhabitants came out of the town upon the same errand; and in spite of my guards, I believe there could not be fewer than ten thousand, at several times, who mounted upon my body by the help of ladders. But a proclamation was soon issued to forbid it upon pain of death. When the workmen found it was impossible for me to break loose, they cut all the strings that bound me; whereupon I rose up with as melancholy a disposition as ever I had in my life. But the noise and astonishment of the people at seeing me rise and walk are not to be



expressed. The chains that held my left leg were about two yards long, and gave me not only the liberty of walking backwards and forwards in a semicircle; but, being fixed within four inches of the gate, allowed me to creep in, and lie at my full length in the temple.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: The University of Leyden, in Holland, was a center for the study of medicine ("physic").[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The eastern Mediterranean.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The title (pronounced *mistress*) designated any woman, married or unmarried. "Old Jury": a street (once "Old Jewry") in the City of London.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Tasmania.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A cable is about six hundred feet (one hundred fathoms).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lilliput is scaled, fairly consistently, at one-twelfth of Gulliver's world.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Wonderment.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Leather jacket.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In rhetoric, complete, well-constructed sentences.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Brought.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Contrivances.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Inducing unnatural sleep.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Presumably a reference to the execution of Charles I, who was sentenced in Westminster Hall.[Return to reference 2](#)

CHAPTER 2. *The Emperor of Lilliput, attended by several of the nobility, comes to see the author in his confinement. The Emperor's person and habit described. Learned men appointed to teach the author their language. He gains favor by his mild disposition. His pockets are searched, and his sword and pistols taken from him.*

When I found myself on my feet, I looked about me, and must confess I never beheld a more entertaining prospect. The country round appeared like a continued garden, and the inclosed fields, which were generally forty foot square, resembled so many beds of flowers. These fields were intermingled with woods of half a stang,<sup>3</sup> and the tallest trees, as I could judge, appeared to be seven foot high. I viewed the town on my left hand, which looked like the painted scene of a city in a theater.

I had been for some hours extremely pressed by the necessities of nature; which was no wonder, it being almost two days since I had last disburthened myself. I was under great difficulties between urgency and shame. The best expedient I could think on, was to creep into my house, which I accordingly did; and shutting the gate after me, I went as far as the length of my chain would suffer; and discharged my body of that uneasy load. But this was the only time I was ever guilty of so uncleanly an action; for which I cannot but hope the candid reader will give some allowance, after he hath maturely and impartially considered my case, and the distress I was in. From this time my constant practice was, as soon as I rose, to perform that business in open air, at the full extent of my chain, and due care was taken every morning before company came, that the offensive matter should be carried off in wheelbarrows by two servants appointed for that purpose. I would not have dwelt so long upon a circumstance, that perhaps at first sight may appear not very momentous, if I had not thought it necessary to justify my character in point of cleanliness to the world; which I am told some of my maligners have been pleased, upon this and other occasions, to call in question.

When this adventure was at an end, I came back out of my house, having occasion for fresh air. The Emperor was already descended from the tower, and advancing on horseback towards me, which had like to have cost him dear; for the beast, although very well trained, yet wholly unused to such a sight, which appeared as if a mountain moved before him, reared up on his hinder feet: but that prince, who is an excellent horseman, kept his seat, until his attendants ran in, and held the bridle, while his Majesty had time to dismount. When he alighted, he surveyed me round with great admiration, but kept beyond the length of my chains. He ordered his cooks and butlers, who were already prepared, to give me victuals and drink, which they pushed forward in a sort of vehicles upon wheels until I could reach them. I took these vehicles, and soon emptied them all; twenty of them were filled with meat, and ten with liquor; each of the former afforded me two or three good mouthfuls, and I emptied the liquor of ten vessels, which was contained in earthen vials, into one vehicle, drinking it off at a draught; and so I did with the rest. The Empress, and young princes of the blood, of both sexes, attended by many ladies, sat at some distance in their chairs; but upon the accident that happened to the Emperor's horse, they alighted, and came near his person; which I am now going to describe. He is taller, by almost the breadth of my nail, than any of his court, which alone is enough to strike an awe into the beholders. His features are strong and masculine, with an Austrian lip, and arched nose, his complexion olive, his countenance<sup>4</sup> erect, his body and limbs well proportioned, all his motions graceful, and his deportment majestic. He was then past his prime, being twenty-eight years and three quarters old, of which he had reigned about seven, in great felicity, and generally victorious. For the better convenience of beholding him, I lay on my side, so that my face was parallel to his, and he stood but three yards off: however, I have had him since many times in my hand, and therefore cannot be deceived in the description. His dress was very plain and simple, the fashion of it between the Asiatic and the European; but he had on his head a light helmet of gold, adorned with jewels, and a plume on the

crest. He held his sword drawn in his hand, to defend himself, if I should happen to break loose; it was almost three inches long, the hilt and scabbard were gold enriched with diamonds. His voice was shrill, but very clear and articulate, and I could distinctly hear it when I stood up. The ladies and courtiers were all most magnificently clad, so that the spot they stood upon seemed to resemble a petticoat spread on the ground, embroidered with figures of gold and silver. His Imperial Majesty spoke often to me, and I returned answers, but neither of us could understand a syllable. There were several of his priests and lawyers present (as I conjectured by their habits) who were commanded to address themselves to me, and I spoke to them in as many languages as I had the least smattering of, which were High and Low Dutch, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, and Lingua Franca;<sup>5</sup> but all to no purpose. After about two hours the court retired, and I was left with a strong guard, to prevent the impertinence, and probably the malice of the rabble, who were very impatient to crowd about me as near as they durst; and some of them had the impudence to shoot their arrows at me as I sat on the ground by the door of my house, whereof one very narrowly missed my left eye. But the colonel ordered six of the ringleaders to be seized, and thought no punishment so proper as to deliver them bound into my hands, which some of his soldiers accordingly did, pushing them forwards with the butt-ends of their pikes into my reach; I took them all in my right hand, put five of them into my coat-pocket; and as to the sixth, I made a countenance as if I would eat him alive. The poor man squalled terribly, and the colonel and his officer were in much pain, especially when they saw me take out my penknife: but I soon put them out of fear; for, looking mildly, and immediately cutting the strings he was bound with, I set him gently on the ground, and away he ran. I treated the rest in the same manner, taking them one by one out of my pocket, and I observed both the soldiers and people were highly obliged at this mark of my clemency, which was represented very much to my advantage at court.

Towards night I got with some difficulty into my house, where I lay on the ground, and continued to do so about a fortnight; during which time the Emperor gave orders to have a bed prepared for me. Six hundred beds of the common measure were brought in carriages, and worked up in my house; an hundred and fifty of their beds sewn together made up the breadth and length, and these were four double, which however kept me but very indifferently from the hardness of the floor, that was of smooth stone. By the same computation they provided me with sheets, blankets, and coverlets, tolerable enough for one who had been so long enured to hardships as I.

As the news of my arrival spread through the kingdom, it brought prodigious numbers of rich, idle, and curious people to see me; so that the villages were almost emptied, and great neglect of tillage and household affairs must have ensued, if his Imperial Majesty had not provided by several proclamations and orders of state against this inconveniency. He directed that those who had already beheld me should return home, and not presume to come within fifty yards of my house without license from court; whereby the secretaries of state got considerable fees.

In the mean time, the Emperor held frequent councils to debate what course should be taken with me; and I was afterwards assured by a particular friend, a person of great quality, who was as much in the secret as any, that the court was under many difficulties concerning me. They apprehended<sup>6</sup> my breaking loose, that my diet would be very expensive, and might cause a famine. Sometimes they determined to starve me, or at least to shoot me in the face and hands with poisoned arrows, which would soon dispatch me: but again they considered, that the stench of so large a carcass might produce a plague in the metropolis, and probably spread through the whole kingdom. In the midst of these consultations, several officers of the army went to the door of the great council chamber; and two of them being admitted, gave an account of my behavior to the six criminals above-mentioned; which made so favorable an impression in the breast of his Majesty, and the whole

board, in my behalf, that an imperial commission was issued out, obliging all the villages nine hundred yards round the city to deliver in every morning six beeves, forty sheep, and other victuals for my sustenance; together with a proportionable quantity of bread and wine, and other liquors: for the due payment of which his Majesty gave assignments<sup>7</sup> upon his treasury. For this prince lives chiefly upon his own demesnes; seldom except upon great occasions raising any subsidies upon his subjects, who are bound to attend him in his wars at their own expense. An establishment was also made of six hundred persons to be my domestics, who had board-wages allowed for their maintenance, and tents built for them very conveniently on each side of my door. It was likewise ordered, that three hundred tailors should make me a suit of clothes after the fashion of the country: that six of his Majesty's greatest scholars should be employed to instruct me in their language: and, lastly, that the Emperor's horses, and those of the nobility, and troops of guards, should be exercised in my sight, to accustom themselves to me. All these orders were duly put in execution; and in about three weeks I made a great progress in learning their language; during which time the Emperor frequently honored me with his visits, and was pleased to assist my masters in teaching me. We began already to converse together in some sort; and the first words I learned, were to express my desire that he would please to give me my liberty; which I every day repeated on my knees.<sup>8</sup> His answer, as I could apprehend, was, that this must be a work of time, not to be thought on without the advice of his council; and that first I must *Lumos kelmin pesso desmar lon emposo*; that is, swear a peace with him and his kingdom. However, that I should be used with all kindness; and he advised me to acquire by my patience and discreet behavior, the good opinion of himself and his subjects. He desired I would not take it ill, if he gave orders to certain proper officers to search me; for probably I might carry about me several weapons, which must needs be dangerous things, if they answered the bulk of so prodigious a person.<sup>9</sup> I said, his Majesty should be satisfied, for I was ready to strip myself, and turn up my pockets before him. This I

delivered part in words, and part in signs. He replied, that by the laws of the kingdom, I must be searched by two of his officers; that he knew this could not be done without my consent and assistance; that he had so good an opinion of my generosity and justice, as to trust their persons in my hands; that whatever they took from me should be returned when I left the country, or paid for at the rate which I would set upon them. I took up the two officers in my hands, put them first into my coat-pockets, and then into every other pocket about me, except my two fobs, and another secret pocket which I had no mind should be searched, wherein I had some little necessities of no consequence to any but myself. In one of my fobs there was a silver watch, and in the other a small quantity of gold in a purse. These gentlemen, having pen, ink, and paper about them, made an exact inventory of everything they saw; and when they had done, desired I would set them down, that they might deliver it to the Emperor. This inventory I afterwards translated into English, and is word for word as follows.

Imprimis,<sup>1</sup> In the right coat-pocket of the Great Man-Mountain (for so I interpret the words *Quinbus Flestrin*) after the strictest search, we found only one great piece of coarse cloth, large enough to be a foot-cloth for your Majesty's chief room of state. In the left pocket, we saw a huge silver chest, with a cover of the same metal, which we the searchers were not able to lift. We desired it should be opened; and one of us, stepping into it, found himself up to the mid leg in a sort of dust, some part whereof flying up to our faces, set us both a sneezing for several times together. In his right waistcoat-pocket, we found a prodigious bundle of white thin substances, folded one over another, about the bigness of three men, tied with a strong cable, and marked with black figures; which we humbly conceive to be writings; every letter almost half as large as the palm of our hands. In the left there was a sort of engine, from the back of which were extended twenty long poles, resembling the palisados<sup>2</sup>



before your Majesty's court; wherewith we conjecture the Man-Mountain combs his head; for we did not always trouble him with questions, because we found it a great difficulty to make him understand us. In the large pocket on the right side of his middle cover (so I translate the word *ranfu-lo*, by which they meant my breeches) we saw a hollow pillar of iron, about the length of a man, fastened to a strong piece of timber, larger than the pillar; and upon one side of the pillar were huge pieces of iron sticking out, cut into strange figures; which we know not what to make of. In the left pocket, another engine of the same kind. In the smaller pocket on the right side, were several round flat pieces of white and red metal, of different bulk; some of the white, which seemed to be silver, were so large and heavy, that my comrade and I could hardly lift them. In the left pocket were two black pillars irregularly shaped: we could not, without difficulty, reach the top of them as we stood at the bottom of his pocket. One of them was covered, and seemed all of a piece; but at the upper end of the other, there appeared a white round substance, about twice the bigness of our heads. Within each of these was inclosed a prodigious plate of steel; which, by our orders, we obliged him to show us, because we apprehended they might be dangerous engines. He took them out of their cases, and told us, that in his own country his practice was to shave his beard with one of these, and to cut his meat with the other. There were two pockets which we could not enter: these he called his fobs; they were two large slits cut into the top of his middle cover, but squeezed close by the pressure of his belly. Out of the right fob hung a great silver chain, with a wonderful kind of engine at the bottom. We directed him to draw out whatever was at the end of the chain, which appeared to be a globe, half silver, and half of some transparent metal: for on the transparent side we saw certain strange figures circularly drawn, and thought we could touch them, until we found our fingers stopped with that lucid substance. He put this engine



to our ears, which made an incessant noise like that of a watermill. And we conjecture it is either some unknown animal, or the god that he worships: but we are more inclined to the latter opinion, because he assured us (if we understood him right, for he expressed himself very imperfectly), that he seldom did any thing without consulting it. He called it his oracle, and said it pointed out the time for every action of his life. From the left fob he took out a net almost large enough for a fisherman, but contrived to open and shut like a purse, and served him for the same use: we found therein several massy pieces of yellow metal, which if they be of real gold, must be of immense value.

Having thus, in obedience to your Majesty's commands, diligently searched all his pockets, we observed a girdle<sup>3</sup> about his waist made of the hide of some prodigious animal; from which, on the left side, hung a sword of the length of five men; and on the right, a bag or pouch divided into cells; each cell capable of holding three of your Majesty's subjects. In one of these cells were several globes or balls of a most ponderous metal, about the bigness of our heads, and required a strong hand to lift them: the other cell contained a heap of certain black grains, but of no great bulk or weight, for we could hold above fifty of them in the palms of our hands.

This is an exact inventory of what we found about the body of the Man-Mountain; who used us with great civility, and due respect to your Majesty's commission. Signed and sealed on the fourth day of the eighty-ninth moon of your Majesty's auspicious reign.

CLEFREN FRELOCK, MARSI FRELOCK.

When this inventory was read over to the Emperor, he directed me to deliver up the several particulars. He first called for my scimitar, which I took out, scabbard and all. In the meantime he ordered three thousand of his choicest troops (who then attended

him) to surround me at a distance, with their bows and arrows just ready to discharge: but I did not observe it; for my eyes were wholly fixed upon his Majesty. He then desired me to draw my scimitar, which, although it had got some rust by the sea water, was in most parts exceeding bright. I did so, and immediately all the troops gave a shout between terror and surprise; for the sun shone clear, and the reflection dazzled their eyes, as I waved the scimitar to and fro in my hand. His Majesty, who is a most magnanimous<sup>4</sup> prince, was less daunted than I could expect; he ordered me to return it into the scabbard, and cast it on the ground as gently as I could, about six foot from the end of my chain. The next thing he demanded was one of the hollow iron pillars, by which he meant my pocket-pistols. I drew it out, and at his desire, as well as I could, expressed to him the use of it, and charging it only with powder, which by the closeness of my pouch happened to escape wetting in the sea (an inconvenience that all prudent mariners take special care to provide against), I first cautioned the Emperor not to be afraid; and then I let it off in the air. The astonishment here was much greater than at the sight of my scimitar. Hundreds fell down as if they had been struck dead; and even the Emperor, although he stood his ground, could not recover himself in some time. I delivered up both my pistols in the same manner as I had done my scimitar, and then my pouch of powder and bullets; begging him that the former might be kept from fire; for it would kindle with the smallest spark, and blow up his imperial palace into the air. I likewise delivered up my watch, which the Emperor was very curious to see; and commanded two of his tallest yeomen of the guards to bear it on a pole upon their shoulders, as draymen in England do a barrel of ale. He was amazed at the continual noise it made, and the motion of the minute-hand, which he could easily discern; for their sight is much more acute than ours: he asked the opinions of his learned men about him, which were various and remote, as the reader may well imagine without my repeating; although indeed I could not very perfectly understand them. I then gave up my silver and copper money, my purse with nine large pieces of gold, and some smaller ones; my

knife and razor, my comb and silver snuffbox, my handkerchief and journal book. My scimitar, pistols, and pouch, were conveyed in carriages to his Majesty's stores; but the rest of my goods were returned me.

I had, as I before observed, one private pocket which escaped their search, wherein there was a pair of spectacles (which I sometimes use for the weakness of my eyes), a pocket perspective,<sup>5</sup> and several other little conveniences; which, being of no consequence to the Emperor, I did not think myself bound in honor to discover, and I apprehended they might be lost or spoiled if I ventured them out of my possession.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: A quarter of an acre.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Bearing, appearance. Swift may be satirically idealizing George I, whom most of the British thought gross.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A jargon, based on Italian, used by traders in the Mediterranean. "High and Low Dutch": German and Dutch, respectively.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Anticipated with fear.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Formal mandates of revenue.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Gulliver's plea for liberty and the threat of starvation or rebellion he represents to his captors suggest the situation of Ireland with respect to England.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: When the Whigs came into power in 1715, the leading Tories, who included Swift's friends Oxford and Bolingbroke (Robert Harley and Henry St. John) as well as Swift himself, were investigated by a committee of secrecy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In the first place (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fences of stakes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Belt.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Courageous, great-spirited. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Telescope.[Return to reference 5](#)

CHAPTER 3. *The author diverts the Emperor and his nobility of both sexes in a very uncommon manner. The diversions of the court of Lilliput described. The author hath his liberty granted him upon certain conditions.*

My gentleness and good behavior had gained so far on the Emperor and his court, and indeed upon the army and people in general, that I began to conceive hopes of getting my liberty in a short time. I took all possible methods to cultivate this favorable disposition. The natives came by degrees to be less apprehensive of any danger from me. I would sometimes lie down, and let five or six of them dance on my hand. And at last the boys and girls would venture to come and play at hide-and-seek in my hair. I had now made a good progress in understanding and speaking their language. The Emperor had a mind one day to entertain me with several of the country shows; wherein they exceed all nations I have known, both for dexterity and magnificence. I was diverted with none so much as that of the rope-dancers, performed upon a slender white thread, extended about two foot, and twelve inches from the ground. Upon which I shall desire liberty, with the reader's patience, to enlarge a little.

This diversion is only practiced by those persons who are candidates for great employments, and high favor, at court. They are trained in this art from their youth, and are not always of noble birth, or liberal education. When a great office is vacant either by death or disgrace (which often happens) five or six of those candidates petition the Emperor to entertain his Majesty and the court with a dance on the rope; and whoever jumps the highest without falling, succeeds in the office. Very often the chief ministers themselves are commanded to show their skill, and to convince the Emperor that they have not lost their faculty. Flimnap,<sup>6</sup> the Treasurer, is allowed to cut a caper on the strait rope, at least an inch higher than any other lord in the whole empire. I have seen him do the summerset several times together upon a trencher<sup>7</sup> fixed on the rope, which is no thicker than a common packthread in England.

My friend Reldresal, Principal Secretary for Private Affairs, is, in my opinion, if I am not partial, the second after the Treasurer; the rest of the great officers are much upon a par.

These diversions are often attended with fatal accidents, whereof great numbers are on record. I myself have seen two or three candidates break a limb. But the danger is much greater when the ministers themselves are commanded to show their dexterity; for, by contending to excel themselves and their fellows, they strain so far, that there is hardly one of them who hath not received a fall; and some of them two or three. I was assured, that a year or two before my arrival, Flimnap would have infallibly broke his neck, if one of the King's cushions,<sup>8</sup> that accidentally lay on the ground, had not weakened the force of his fall.

There is likewise another diversion, which is only shown before the Emperor and Empress, and first minister, upon particular occasions. The Emperor lays on a table three fine silken threads of six inches long. One is blue, the other red, and the third green.<sup>9</sup> These threads are proposed as prizes for those persons whom the Emperor hath a mind to distinguish by a peculiar mark of his favor. The ceremony is performed in his Majesty's great chamber of state; where the candidates are to undergo a trial of dexterity very different from the former, and such as I have not observed the least resemblance of in any other country of the old or the new world. The Emperor holds a stick in his hands, both ends parallel to the horizon, while the candidates, advancing one by one, sometimes leap over the stick, sometimes creep under it backwards and forwards several times, according as the stick is advanced or depressed. Sometimes the Emperor holds one end of the stick, and his first minister the other; sometimes the minister has it entirely to himself. Whoever performs his part with most agility, and holds out the longest in *leaping* and *creeping*, is rewarded with the blue-colored silk; the red is given to the next, and the green to the third, which they all wear girt twice round about the middle; and you see few great persons about this court who are not adorned with one of these girdles.

The horses of the army, and those of the royal stables, having been daily led before me, were no longer shy, but would come up to my very feet, without starting. The riders would leap them over my hand as I held it on the ground; and one of the Emperor's huntsmen, upon a large courser, took<sup>1</sup> my foot, shoe and all; which was indeed a prodigious leap. I had the good fortune to divert the Emperor one day after a very extraordinary manner. I desired he would order several sticks of two foot high, and the thickness of an ordinary cane, to be brought me; whereupon his Majesty commanded the master of his woods to give directions accordingly; and the next morning six woodmen arrived with as many carriages, drawn by eight horses to each. I took nine of these sticks, and fixing them firmly in the ground in a quadrangular figure, two foot and a half square, I took four other sticks, and tied them parallel at each corner, about two foot from the ground; then I fastened my handkerchief to the nine sticks that stood erect, and extended it on all sides till it was as tight as the top of a drum; and the four parallel sticks, rising about five inches higher than the handkerchief, served as ledges on each side. When I had finished my work, I desired the Emperor to let a troop of his best horse, twenty-four in number, come and exercise upon this plain. His Majesty approved of the proposal, and I took them up one by one in my hands, ready mounted and armed, with the proper officers to exercise them. As soon as they got into order, they divided into two parties, performed mock skirmishes, discharged blunt arrows, drew their swords, fled and pursued, attacked and retired; and in short discovered the best military discipline I ever beheld. The parallel sticks secured them and their horses from falling over the stage; and the Emperor was so much delighted, that he ordered this entertainment to be repeated several days; and once was pleased to be lifted up, and give the word of command; and, with great difficulty, persuaded even the Empress herself to let me hold her in her close chair<sup>2</sup> within two yards of the stage, from whence she was able to take a full view of the whole performance. It was my good fortune that no ill accident happened in these entertainments, only once a fiery horse that

belonged to one of the captains pawing with his hoof struck a hole in my handkerchief, and his foot slipping, he overthrew his rider and himself; but I immediately relieved them both; for covering the hole with one hand, I set down the troop with the other, in the same manner as I took them up. The horse that fell was strained in the left shoulder, but the rider got no hurt, and I repaired my handkerchief as well as I could; however, I would not trust to the strength of it any more in such dangerous enterprises.

About two or three days before I was set at liberty, as I was entertaining the court with these kinds of feats, there arrived an express to inform his Majesty that some of his subjects, riding near the place where I was first taken up, had seen a great black substance lying on the ground, very oddly shaped, extending its edges round as wide as his Majesty's bedchamber, and rising up in the middle as high as a man; that it was no living creature, as they at first apprehended, for it lay on the grass without motion, and some of them had walked round it several times; that by mounting upon each other's shoulders, they had got to the top, which was flat and even; and stamping upon it they found it was hollow within; that they humbly conceived it might be something belonging to the Man-Mountain, and if his Majesty pleased, they would undertake to bring it with only five horses. I presently<sup>3</sup> knew what they meant; and was glad at heart to receive this intelligence. It seems upon my first reaching the shore after our shipwreck, I was in such confusion, that before I came to the place where I went to sleep, my hat, which I had fastened with a string to my head while I was rowing, and had stuck on all the time I was swimming, fell off after I came to land; the string, as I conjecture, breaking by some accident which I never observed, but thought my hat had been lost at sea. I intreated his Imperial Majesty to give orders it might be brought to me as soon as possible, describing to him the use and the nature of it: and the next day the wagoners arrived with it, but not in a very good condition; they had bored two holes in the brim, within an inch and half of the edge, and fastened two hooks in the holes; these hooks were tied by a long cord to the harness, and thus my hat was



dragged along for above half an English mile: but the ground in that country being extremely smooth and level, it received less damage than I expected.

Two days after this adventure, the Emperor, having ordered that part of his army which quarters in and about his metropolis to be in a readiness, took a fancy of diverting himself in a very singular manner. He desired I would stand like a colossus, with my legs as far asunder as I conveniently could. He then commanded his general (who was an old experienced leader, and a great patron of mine) to draw up the troops in close order, and march them under me; the foot<sup>4</sup> by twenty-four in a breast, and the horse by sixteen, with drums beating, colors flying, and pikes advanced. This body consisted of three thousand foot, and a thousand horse. His Majesty gave orders, upon pain of death, that every soldier in his march should observe the strictest decency with regard to my person; which, however, could not prevent some of the younger officers from turning up their eyes as they passed under me. And, to confess the truth, my breeches were at that time in so ill a condition, that they afforded some opportunities for laughter and admiration.

I had sent so many memorials and petitions for my liberty, that his Majesty at length mentioned the matter first in the cabinet, and then in a full council; where it was opposed by none, except Skyresh Bolgolam,<sup>5</sup> who was pleased, without any provocation, to be my mortal enemy. But it was carried against him by the whole board, and confirmed by the Emperor. That minister was *Galbet*, or Admiral of the Realm; very much in his master's confidence, and a person well versed in affairs, but of a morose and sour complexion.<sup>6</sup> However, he was at length persuaded to comply; but prevailed that the articles and conditions upon which I should be set free, and to which I must swear, should be drawn up by himself. These articles were brought to me by Skyresh Bolgolam in person, attended by two under-secretaries, and several persons of distinction. After they were read, I was demanded to swear to the performance of them; first in the manner of my own country, and afterwards in the method prescribed by their laws; which was to hold my right foot in my left

hand, to place the middle finger of my right hand on the crown of my head, and my thumb on the tip of my right ear. But because the reader may perhaps be curious to have some idea of the style and manner of expression peculiar to that people, as well as to know the articles upon which I recovered my liberty, I have made a translation of the whole instrument,<sup>7</sup> word for word, as near as I was able; which I here offer to the public.

GOLBASTO MOMAREN EVLAME GURDILO SHEFIN MULLY ULLY GUE, most mighty Emperor of Lilliput, delight and terror of the universe, whose dominions extend five thousand blustrugs (about twelve miles in circumference) to the extremities of the globe; Monarch of all Monarchs; taller than the sons of men; whose feet press down to the center, and whose head strikes against the sun; at whose nod the princes of the earth shake their knees; pleasant as the spring, comfortable as the summer, fruitful as autumn, dreadful as winter. His most sublime Majesty proposeth to the Man-Mountain, lately arrived at our celestial dominions, the following articles, which by a solemn oath he shall be obliged to perform.

First, The Man-Mountain shall not depart from our dominions, without our license under our great seal.

Secondly, He shall not presume to come into our metropolis, without our express order; at which time the inhabitants shall have two hours warning, to keep within their doors.

Thirdly, The said Man-Mountain shall confine his walks to our principal high roads; and not offer to walk or lie down in a meadow, or field of corn.

Fourthly, As he walks the said roads, he shall take the utmost care not to trample upon the bodies of any of our loving subjects, their horses, or carriages, nor take any of our said subjects into his hands, without their own consent.

Fifthly, If an express require extraordinary dispatch, the Man-Mountain shall be obliged to carry in his pocket the messenger and horse, a six days' journey once in every

moon, and return the said messenger back (if so required) safe to our Imperial Presence.

Sixthly, He shall be our ally against our enemies in the island of Blefuscu, and do his utmost to destroy their fleet, which is now preparing to invade us.

Seventhly, That the said Man-Mountain shall, at his times of leisure, be aiding and assisting to our workmen, in helping to raise certain great stones, towards covering the wall of the principal park, and other our royal buildings.

Eighthly, That the said Man-Mountain shall, in two moons' time, deliver in an exact survey of the circumference of our dominions by a computation of his own paces round the coast.

Lastly, That upon his solemn oath to observe all the above articles, the said Man-Mountain shall have a daily allowance of meat and drink sufficient for the support of 1,728 of our subjects; with free access to our Royal Person, and other marks of our favor. Given at our palace at Belfaborac the twelfth day of the ninety-first moon of our reign.

I swore and subscribed to these articles with great cheerfulness and content, although some of them were not so honorable as I could have wished; which proceeded wholly from the malice of Skyresh Bolgolam the High Admiral: whereupon my chains were immediately unlocked, and I was at full liberty: the Emperor himself in person did me the honor to be by at the whole ceremony. I made my acknowledgements by prostrating myself at his Majesty's feet: but he commanded me to rise; and after many gracious expressions, which, to avoid the censure of vanity, I shall not repeat, he added, that he hoped I should prove a useful servant, and well deserve all the favors he had already conferred upon me, or might do for the future.

The reader may please to observe, that in the last article for the recovery of my liberty, the Emperor stipulates to allow me a quantity of meat and drink, sufficient for the support of 1,728 Lilliputians.

Some time after, asking a friend at court how they came to fix on that determinate number, he told me, that his Majesty's mathematicians, having taken the height of my body by the help of a quadrant, and finding it to exceed theirs in the proportion of twelve to one, they concluded from the similarity of their bodies, that mine must contain at least 1,728 of theirs, and consequently would require as much food as was necessary to support that number of Lilliputians. By which, the reader may conceive an idea of the ingenuity of that people, as well as the prudent and exact economy of so great a prince.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Sir Robert Walpole, the Whig head of the government, was notorious in Swift's circle for his political acrobatics.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Plate. "Summerset": somersault.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A mistress of George I was supposed to have helped restore Walpole to office in 1721.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Orders of the Garter, the Bath, and the Thistle, conferred for services to the king.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Jumped over.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An enclosed or sedan chair.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Immediately.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Foot soldiers or infantry.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Earl of Nottingham, an enemy of Swift.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Disposition.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A formal legal document.[Return to reference 7](#)

CHAPTER 4. *Mildendo, the metropolis of Lilliput, described, together with the Emperor's palace. A conversation between the author and a principal secretary, concerning the affairs of that empire; the author's offers to serve the Emperor in his wars.*

The first request I made after I had obtained my liberty, was, that I might have license to see Mildendo, the metropolis; which the Emperor easily granted me, but with a special charge to do no hurt, either to the inhabitants, or their houses. The people had notice by proclamation of my design to visit the town. The wall which encompassed it is two foot and an half high, and at least eleven inches broad, so that a coach and horses may be driven very safely round it; and it is flanked with strong towers at ten foot distance. I stepped over the great western gate, and passed very gently, and sideling<sup>8</sup> through the two principal streets, only in my short waistcoat, for fear of damaging the roofs and eaves of the houses with the skirts of my coat. I walked with the utmost circumspection, to avoid treading on any stragglers, who might remain in the streets, although the orders were very strict, that all people should keep in their houses, at their own peril. The garret windows and tops of houses were so crowded with spectators, that I thought in all my travels I had not seen a more populous place. The city is an exact square, each side of the wall being five hundred foot long. The two great streets, which run cross and divide it into four quarters, are five foot wide. The lanes and alleys, which I could not enter, but only viewed them as I passed, are from twelve to eighteen inches. The town is capable of holding five hundred thousand souls. The houses are from three to five stories. The shops and markets well provided.

The Emperor's palace is in the center of the city, where the two great streets meet. It is enclosed by a wall of two foot high, and twenty foot distant from the buildings. I had his Majesty's permission to step over this wall; and the space being so wide between that and the palace, I could easily view it on every side. The outward court is a square of forty foot, and includes two other courts: in the inmost are the royal apartments, which I was very desirous to see, but

found it extremely difficult; for the great gates, from one square into another, were but eighteen inches high, and seven inches wide. Now the buildings of the outer court were at least five foot high; and it was impossible for me to stride over them, without infinite damage to the pile, although the walls were strongly built of hewn stone, and four inches thick. At the same time the Emperor had a great desire that I should see the magnificence of his palace; but this I was not able to do till three days after, which I spent in cutting down with my knife some of the largest trees in the royal park, about an hundred yards distance from the city. Of these trees I made two stools, each about three foot high, and strong enough to bear my weight. The people having received notice a second time, I went again through the city to the palace, with my two stools in my hands. When I came to the side of the outer court, I stood upon one stool, and took the other in my hand: this I lifted over the roof, and gently set it down on the space between the first and second court, which was eight foot wide. I then stepped over the buildings very conveniently from one stool to the other, and drew up the first after me with a hooked stick. By this contrivance I got into the inmost court; and lying down upon my side, I applied my face to the windows of the middle stories, which were left open on purpose, and discovered the most splendid apartments that can be imagined. There I saw the Empress, and the young princes in their several lodgings, with their chief attendants about them. Her Imperial Majesty was pleased to smile very graciously upon me and gave me out of the window her hand to kiss.

But I shall not anticipate the reader with farther descriptions of this kind, because I reserve them for a greater work, which is now almost ready for the press; containing a general description of this empire, from its first erection, through a long series of princes, with a particular account of their wars and politics, laws, learning, and religion; their plants and animals, their peculiar manners and customs, with other matters very curious and useful; my chief design at present being only to relate such events and transactions as

happened to the public, or to myself, during a residence of about nine months in that empire.

One morning, about a fortnight after I had obtained my liberty, Reldresal, Principal Secretary (as they style him) of Private Affairs, came to my house, attended only by one servant. He ordered his coach to wait at a distance, and desired I would give him an hour's audience; which I readily consented to, on account of his quality, and personal merits, as well as of the many good offices he had done me during my solicitations at court. I offered to lie down, that he might the more conveniently reach my ear; but he chose rather to let me hold him in my hand during our conversation. He began with compliments on my liberty, said he might pretend to some merit in it; but, however, added, that if it had not been for the present situation of things at court, perhaps I might not have obtained it so soon. For, said he, as flourishing a condition as we appear to be in to foreigners, we labor under two mighty evils; a violent faction at home, and the danger of an invasion by a most potent enemy from abroad. As to the first, you are to understand, that for above seventy moons past, there have been two struggling parties in the empire, under the names of *Tramecksan*, and *Slamecksan*,<sup>9</sup> from the high and low heels on their shoes, by which they distinguish themselves.

It is alleged indeed, that the high heels are most agreeable to our ancient constitution: but however this be, his Majesty hath determined to make use of only low heels in the administration of the government and all offices in the gift of the crown; as you cannot but observe; and particularly, that his Majesty's imperial heels are lower at least by a *drurr* than any of his court; (*drurr* is a measure about the fourteenth part of an inch). The animosities between these two parties run so high, that they will neither eat nor drink, nor talk with each other. We compute the *Tramecksan*, or High-Heels, to exceed us in number; but the power is wholly on our side. We apprehend his Imperial Highness, the heir to the crown, to have some tendency towards the High-Heels; at least we can plainly discover one of his heels higher than the other, which gives him a

hobble in his gait.<sup>1</sup> Now, in the midst of these intestine disquiets, we are threatened with an invasion from the island of Blefuscu,<sup>2</sup> which is the other great empire of the universe, almost as large and powerful as this of his Majesty. For as to what we have heard you affirm, that there are other kingdoms and states in the world, inhabited by human creatures as large as yourself, our philosophers are in much doubt; and would rather conjecture that you dropped from the moon, or one of the stars; because it is certain, that an hundred mortals of your bulk would, in a short time, destroy all the fruits and cattle of his Majesty's dominions. Besides, our histories of six thousand moons make no mention of any other regions, than the two great empires of Lilliput and Blefuscu. Which two mighty powers have, as I was going to tell you, been engaged in a most obstinate war for six and thirty moons past. It began upon the following occasion. It is allowed on all hands, that the primitive way of breaking eggs before we eat them, was upon the larger end: but his present Majesty's grandfather, while he was a boy, going to eat an egg, and breaking it according to the ancient practice, happened to cut one of his fingers. Whereupon the Emperor his father published an edict, commanding all his subjects, upon great penalties, to break the smaller end of their eggs. The people so highly resented this law, that our histories tell us there have been six rebellions raised on that account; wherein one emperor lost his life, and another his crown.<sup>3</sup> These civil commotions were constantly fomented by the monarchs of Blefuscu; and when they were quelled, the exiles always fled for refuge to that empire. It is computed, that eleven thousand persons have, at several times, suffered death, rather than submit to break their eggs at the smaller end. Many hundred large volumes have been published upon this controversy: but the books of the Big-Endians have been long forbidden, and the whole party rendered incapable by law of holding employments.<sup>4</sup> During the course of these troubles, the emperors of Blefuscu did frequently expostulate by their ambassadors, accusing us of making a schism in religion, by offending against a fundamental doctrine of our great prophet Lustrog, in the fifty-fourth chapter of the *Brundecral* (which



is their Alcoran<sup>5</sup>). This, however, is thought to be a mere strain upon the text: for the words are these; *That all true believers shall break their eggs at the convenient end*: and which is the convenient end, seems, in my humble opinion, to be left to every man's conscience, or at least in the power of the chief magistrate<sup>6</sup> to determine. Now the Big-Endian exiles have found so much credit in the Emperor of Blefuscu's court, and so much private assistance and encouragement from their party here at home, that a bloody war hath been carried on between the two empires for six and thirty moons with various success;<sup>7</sup> during which time we have lost forty capital ships, and a much greater number of smaller vessels, together with thirty thousand of our best seamen and soldiers; and the damage received by the enemy is reckoned to be somewhat greater than ours. However, they have now equipped a numerous fleet, and are just preparing to make a descent upon us; and his Imperial Majesty, placing great confidence in your valor and strength, hath commanded me to lay this account of his affairs before you.

I desired the Secretary to present my humble duty to the Emperor, and to let him know, that I thought it would not become me, who was a foreigner, to interfere with parties; but I was ready, with the hazard of my life, to defend his person and state against all invaders.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Sideways. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Tory (High Church) and Whig (Low Church), respectively. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Prince of Wales (later George II) had friends in both parties. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: France. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Swift's satirical allegory of the strife between Catholics (Big-Endians) and Protestants (Little-Endians) touches on Henry VIII (who "broke" with the Pope), Charles I (who lost his life), and James II (who lost his crown). [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The Test Act (1673) prevented Catholics and Nonconformists from holding office unless they accepted the Anglican Sacrament.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Koran.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ruler, sovereign. Swift himself accepted the right of the king to determine religious observances.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Reminiscent of the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13).[Return to reference 7](#)

CHAPTER 5. *The author by an extraordinary stratagem prevents an invasion. A high title of honor is conferred upon him. Ambassadors arrive from the Emperor of Blefuscu, and sue for peace. The Empress's apartment on fire by an accident; the author instrumental in saving the rest of the palace.*

The empire of Blefuscu is an island situated to the north north-east side of Lilliput, from whence it is parted only by a channel of eight hundred yards wide. I had not yet seen it, and upon this notice of an intended invasion, I avoided appearing on that side of the coast, for fear of being discovered by some of the enemy's ships, who had received no intelligence of me; all intercourse between the two empires having been strictly forbidden during the war, upon pain of death; and an embargo laid by our Emperor upon all vessels whatsoever. I communicated to his Majesty a project I had formed of seizing the enemy's whole fleet; which, as our scouts assured us, lay at anchor in the harbor ready to sail with the first fair wind. I consulted the most experienced seamen upon the depth of the channel, which they had often plumbed; who told me, that in the middle at high water it was seventy *glumgluffs* deep, which is about six foot of European measure; and the rest of it fifty *glumgluffs* at most. I walked to the northeast coast over against Blefuscu; where, lying down behind a hillock, I took out my small pocket perspective glass, and viewed the enemy's fleet at anchor, consisting of about fifty men of war, and a great number of transports: I then came back to my house, and gave order (for which I had a warrant) for a great quantity of the strongest cable and bars of iron. The cable was about as thick as packthread and the bars of the length and size of a knitting-needle. I trebled the cable to make it stronger, and for the same reason I twisted three of the iron bars together, bending the extremities into a hook. Having thus fixed fifty hooks to as many cables, I went back to the northeast coast, and putting off my coat, shoes, and stockings, walked into the sea in my leathern jerkin, about half an hour before high water. I waded with what haste I could, and swam in the middle about thirty yards until I felt the ground; I arrived at the fleet in less than half an hour. The enemy

was so frightened when they saw me, that they leaped out of their ships, and swam to shore, where there could not be fewer than thirty thousand souls. I then took my tackling, and fastening a hook to the hole at the prow of each, I tied all the cords together at the end. While I was thus employed, the enemy discharged several thousand arrows, many of which stuck in my hands and face; and besides the excessive smart, gave me much disturbance in my work. My greatest apprehension was for my eyes, which I should have infallibly lost, if I had not suddenly thought of an expedient. I kept, among other little necessities, a pair of spectacles in a private pocket, which, as I observed before, had escaped the Emperor's searchers. These I took out, and fastened as strongly as I could upon my nose; and thus armed went on boldly with my work in spite of the enemy's arrows; many of which struck against the glasses of my spectacles, but without any other effect, further than a little to discompose them. I had now fastened all the hooks, and taking the knot in my hand, began to pull; but not a ship would stir, for they were all too fast by their anchors, so that the boldest part of my enterprise remained. I therefore let go the cord, and leaving the hooks fixed to the ships, I resolutely cut with my knife the cables that fastened the anchors, receiving about two hundred shots in my face and hands; then I took up the knotted end of the cables to which my hooks were tied; and with great ease drew fifty of the enemy's largest men-of-war after me.

The Blefuscudians, who had not the least imagination of what I intended, were at first confounded with astonishment. They had seen me cut the cables, and thought my design was only to let the ships run adrift, or fall foul on each other: but when they perceived the whole fleet moving in order, and saw me pulling at the end, they set up such a scream of grief and despair, that it is almost impossible to describe or conceive. When I had got out of danger, I stopped a while to pick out the arrows that stuck in my hands and face, and rubbed on some of the same ointment that was given me at my first arrival, as I have formerly mentioned. I then took off my spectacles, and waiting about an hour until the tide was a little fallen, I waded

through the middle with my cargo, and arrived safe at the royal port of Lilliput.

The Emperor and his whole court stood on the shore, expecting the issue of this great adventure. They saw the ships move forward in a large half-moon, but could not discern me, who was up to my breast in water. When I advanced to the middle of the channel, they were yet more in pain, because I was under water to my neck. The Emperor concluded me to be drowned, and that the enemy's fleet was approaching in a hostile manner: but he was soon eased of his fears, for the channel growing shallower every step I made, I came in a short time within hearing; and holding up the end of the cable by which the fleet was fastened, I cried in a loud voice, Long live the most puissant Emperor of Lilliput! This great prince received me at my landing with all possible encomiums, and created me a *Nardac* upon the spot, which is the highest title of honor among them.

His Majesty desired I would take some other opportunity of bringing all the rest of his enemy's ships into his ports. And so unmeasurable is the ambition of princes, that he seemed to think of nothing less than reducing the whole empire of Blefuscu into a province, and governing it by a viceroy; of destroying the Big-Endian exiles, and compelling that people to break the smaller end of their eggs, by which he would remain sole monarch of the whole world. But I endeavored to divert him from this design, by many arguments drawn from the topics of policy as well as justice: and I plainly protested, that I would never be an instrument of bringing a free and brave people into slavery. And when the matter was debated in council, the wisest part of the ministry were of my opinion.

This open bold declaration of mine was so opposite to the schemes and politics of his Imperial Majesty, that he could never forgive me; he mentioned it in a very artful manner at council, where I was told that some of the wisest appeared, at least by their silence, to be of my opinion; but others, who were my secret enemies, could not forbear some expressions, which by a side-wind<sup>8</sup> reflected on me. And from this time began an intrigue between his Majesty and a junta of ministers maliciously bent against me, which

broke out in less than two months, and had like to have ended in my utter destruction. Of so little weight are the greatest services to princes, when put into the balance with a refusal to gratify their passions.<sup>9</sup>

About three weeks after this exploit, there arrived a solemn embassy from Blefuscu, with humble offers of a peace; which was soon concluded upon conditions very advantageous to our Emperor; wherewith I shall not trouble the reader. There were six ambassadors, with a train of about five hundred persons; and their entry was very magnificent, suitable to the grandeur of their master, and the importance of their business. When their treaty was finished, wherein I did them several good offices by the credit I now had, or at least appeared to have at court, their Excellencies, who were privately told how much I had been their friend, made me a visit in form. They began with many compliments upon my valor and generosity; invited me to that kingdom in the Emperor their master's name; and desired me to show them some proofs of my prodigious strength, of which they had heard so many wonders; wherein I readily obliged them, but shall not interrupt the reader with the particulars.

When I had for some time entertained their Excellencies to their infinite satisfaction and surprise, I desired they would do me the honor to present my most humble respects to the Emperor their master, the renown of whose virtues had so justly filled the whole world with admiration, and whose royal person I resolved to attend before I returned to my own country. Accordingly, the next time I had the honor to see our Emperor, I desired his general license to wait on the Blefuscudian monarch, which he was pleased to grant me, as I could plainly perceive, in a very cold manner; but could not guess the reason, till I had a whisper from a certain person, that Flimnap and Bolgolam had represented my intercourse with those ambassadors as a mark of disaffection, from which I am sure my heart was wholly free. And this was the first time I began to conceive some imperfect idea of courts and ministers.

It is to be observed, that these ambassadors spoke to me by an interpreter; the languages of both empires differing as much from each other as any two in Europe, and each nation priding itself upon the antiquity, beauty, and energy of their own tongues, with an avowed contempt for that of their neighbor; yet our Emperor, standing upon the advantage he had got by the seizure of their fleet, obliged them to deliver their credentials, and make their speech, in the Lilliputian tongue. And it must be confessed, that from the great intercourse of trade and commerce between both realms, from the continual reception of exiles, which is mutual among them, and from the custom in each empire to send their young nobility and richer gentry to the other, in order to polish themselves, by seeing the world, and understanding men and manners, there are few persons of distinction, or merchants, or seamen, who dwell in the maritime parts, but what can hold conversation in both tongues; as I found some weeks after, when I went to pay my respects to the Emperor of Blefuscu, which in the midst of great misfortunes, through the malice of my enemies, proved a very happy adventure to me, as I shall relate in its proper place.

The reader may remember, that when I signed those articles upon which I recovered my liberty, there were some which I disliked upon account of their being too servile, neither could any thing but an extreme necessity have forced me to submit. But being now a *Nardac*, of the highest rank in that empire, such offices<sup>1</sup> were looked upon as below my dignity, and the Emperor (to do him justice) never once mentioned them to me. However, it was not long before I had an opportunity of doing his Majesty, at least as I then thought, a most signal service. I was alarmed at midnight with the cries of many hundred people at my door; by which being suddenly awaked, I was in some kind of terror. I heard the word *burglum* repeated incessantly; several of the Emperor's court, making their way through the crowd, intreated me to come immediately to the palace, where her Imperial Majesty's apartment was on fire, by the carelessness of a maid of honor, who fell asleep while she was reading a romance. I got up in an instant; and orders being given to

clear the way before me, and it being likewise a moonshine night, I made a shift to get to the palace without trampling on any of the people. I found they had already applied ladders to the walls of the apartment, and were well provided with buckets, but the water was at some distance. These buckets were about the size of a large thimble, and the poor people supplied me with them as fast as they could; but the flame was so violent, that they did little good. I might easily have stifled it with my coat, which I unfortunately left behind me for haste, and came away only in my leathern jerkin. The case seemed wholly desperate and deplorable; and this magnificent palace would have infallibly been burnt down to the ground, if, by a presence of mind, unusual to me, I had not suddenly thought of an expedient. I had the evening before drank plentifully of a most delicious wine, called *glimigrim* (the Blefuscudians call it *flunec*, but ours is esteemed the better sort), which is very diuretic. By the luckiest chance in the world, I had not discharged myself of any part of it. The heat I had contracted by coming very near the flames, and by my laboring to quench them, made the wine begin to operate by urine; which I voided in such a quantity, and applied so well to the proper places, that in three minutes the fire was wholly extinguished; and the rest of that noble pile, which had cost so many ages in erecting, preserved from destruction.

It was now daylight, and I returned to my house, without waiting to congratulate with the Emperor; because, although I had done a very eminent piece of service, yet I could not tell how his Majesty might resent the manner by which I had performed it: for, by the fundamental laws of the realm, it is capital<sup>2</sup> in any person, of what quality soever, to make water within the precincts of the palace. But I was a little comforted by a message from his Majesty, that he would give orders to the Grand Justiciary for passing my pardon in form; which, however, I could not obtain. And I was privately assured, that the Empress, conceiving the greatest abhorrence of what I had done,<sup>3</sup> removed to the most distant side of the court, firmly resolved that those buildings should never be repaired for her



use; and, in the presence of her chief confidants, could not forbear vowing revenge.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Indirectly.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: After a series of British naval victories, the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) had ended the war with France, but the Tory ministers who engineered the peace were subsequently accused of having sold out to the enemy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Duties.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Punishable by death.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Queen Anne, whom Swift called “a royal prude,” strongly objected to the coarseness of *A Tale of a Tub*.[Return to reference 3](#)

CHAPTER 6. *Of the inhabitants of Lilliput; their learning, laws, and customs, the manner of educating their children. The author's way of living in that country. His vindication of a great lady.*

Although I intend to leave the description of this empire to a particular treatise, yet in the mean time I am content to gratify the curious reader with some general ideas. As the common size of the natives is somewhat under six inches, so there is an exact proportion in all other animals, as well as plants and trees: for instance, the tallest horses and oxen are between four and five inches in height, the sheep an inch and a half, more or less; their geese about the bigness of a sparrow; and so the several gradations downwards, till you come to the smallest, which, to my sight, were almost invisible; but nature hath adapted the eyes of the Lilliputians to all objects proper for their view: they see with great exactness, but at no great distance. And to show the sharpness of their sight towards objects that are near, I have been much pleased with observing a cook pulling<sup>4</sup> a lark, which was not so large as a common fly; and a young girl threading an invisible needle with invisible silk. Their tallest trees are about seven foot high; I mean some of those in the great royal park, the tops whereof I could but just reach with my fist clinched. The other vegetables<sup>5</sup> are in the same proportion; but this I leave to the reader's imagination.

I shall say but little at present of their learning, which for many ages hath flourished in all its branches among them: but their manner of writing is very peculiar; being neither from the left to the right, like the Europeans; nor from the right to the left, like the Arabians; nor from up to down, like the Chinese; nor from down to up, like the Cascagians;<sup>6</sup> but aslant from one corner of the paper to the other, like ladies in England.

They bury their dead with their heads directly downwards; because they hold an opinion that in eleven thousand moons they are all to rise again; in which period, the earth (which they conceive to be flat) will turn upside down, and by this means they shall, at their resurrection, be found ready standing on their feet. The

learned among them confess the absurdity of this doctrine; but the practice still continues, in compliance to the vulgar.<sup>7</sup>

There are some laws and customs in this empire very peculiar; and if they were not so directly contrary to those of my own dear country, I should be tempted to say a little in their justification. It is only to be wished, that they were as well executed. The first I shall mention relateth to informers. All crimes against the state are punished here with the utmost severity; but if the person accused make his innocence plainly to appear upon his trial, the accuser is immediately put to an ignominious death; and out of his goods or lands, the innocent person is quadruply recompensed for the loss of his time, for the danger he underwent, for the hardship of his imprisonment, and for all the charges he hath been at in making his defense. Or, if that fund be deficient, it is largely<sup>8</sup> supplied by the crown. The Emperor doth also confer on him some public mark of his favor; and proclamation is made of his innocence through the whole city.

They look upon fraud as a greater crime than theft, and therefore seldom fail to punish it with death; for they allege, that care and vigilance, with a very common understanding, may preserve a man's goods from thieves; but honesty hath no fence against superior cunning: and since it is necessary that there should be a perpetual intercourse of buying and selling, and dealing upon credit, where fraud is permitted or connived at, or hath no law to punish it, the honest dealer is always undone, and the knave gets the advantage. I remember when I was once interceding with the King for a criminal who had wronged his master of a great sum of money, which he had received by order, and ran away with; and happening to tell his Majesty, by way of extenuation, that it was only a breach of trust, the Emperor thought it monstrous in me to offer, as a defense, the greatest aggravation of the crime: and truly, I had little to say in return, farther than the common answer, that different nations had different customs; for, I confess, I was heartily ashamed.

Although we usually call reward and punishment the two hinges upon which all government turns, yet I could never observe this

maxim to be put in practice by any nation, except that of Lilliput. Whoever can there bring sufficient proof that he hath strictly observed the laws of his country for seventy-three moons, hath a claim to certain privileges, according to his quality<sup>9</sup> and condition of life, with a proportionable sum of money out of a fund appropriated for that use: he likewise acquires the title of *Snilpall*, or *Legal*, which is added to his name, but doth not descend to his posterity. And these people thought it a prodigious defect of policy among us, when I told them that our laws were enforced only by penalties, without any mention of reward. It is upon this account that the image of Justice, in their courts of judicature, is formed with six eyes, two before, as many behind, and on each side one, to signify circumspection; with a bag of gold open in her right hand, and a sword sheathed in her left, to show she is more disposed to reward than to punish.

In choosing persons for all employments, they have more regard to good morals than to great abilities; for, since government is necessary to mankind, they believe that the common size of human understandings is fitted to some station or other; and that Providence never intended to make the management of public affairs a mystery, to be comprehended only by a few persons of sublime genius, of which there seldom are three born in an age: but they suppose truth, justice, temperance, and the like, to be in every man's power; the practice of which virtues, assisted by experience and a good intention, would qualify any man for the service of his country, except where a course of study is required. But they thought the want of moral virtues was so far from being supplied by superior endowments of the mind, that employments could never be put into such dangerous hands as those of persons so qualified; and at least, that the mistakes committed by ignorance in a virtuous disposition would never be of such fatal consequence to the public weal, as the practices of a man whose inclinations led him to be corrupt, and had great abilities to manage, to multiply, and defend his corruptions.

In like manner, the disbelief of a divine Providence renders a man incapable of holding any public station; for since kings avow themselves to be the deputies of Providence, the Lilliputians think nothing can be more absurd than for a prince to employ such men as disown the authority under which he acteth.

In relating these and the following laws, I would only be understood to mean the original institutions, and not the most scandalous corruptions into which these people are fallen by the degenerate nature of man. For as to that infamous practice of acquiring great employments by dancing on the ropes, or badges of favor and distinction by leaping over sticks, and creeping under them, the reader is to observe, that they were first introduced by the grandfather of the Emperor now reigning; and grew to the present height by the gradual increase of party and faction.

Ingratitude is among them a capital crime, as we read it to have been in some other countries; for they reason thus, that whoever makes ill returns to his benefactor, must needs be a common enemy to the rest of mankind, from whom he hath received no obligation; and therefore such a man is not fit to live.

Their notions relating to the duties of parents and children differ extremely from ours. For, since the conjunction of male and female is founded upon the great law of nature, in order to propagate and continue the species, the Lilliputians will needs have it, that men and women are joined together like other animals, by the motives of concupiscence; and that their tenderness towards their young proceedeth from the like natural principle: for which reason they will never allow, that a child is under any obligation to his father for begetting him, or to his mother for bringing him into the world; which, considering the miseries of human life, was neither a benefit in itself, nor intended so by his parents, whose thoughts in their love-encounters were otherwise employed. Upon these, and the like reasonings, their opinion is, that parents are the last of all others to be trusted with the education of their own children: and therefore they have in every town public nurseries, where all parents, except cottagers<sup>1</sup> and laborers, are obliged to send their infants of both

sexes to be reared and educated when they come to the age of twenty moons; at which time they are supposed to have some rudiments of docility. These schools are of several kinds, suited to different qualities, and to both sexes. They have certain professors<sup>2</sup> well skilled in preparing children for such a condition of life as befits the rank of their parents, and their own capacities as well as inclinations. I shall first say something of the male nurseries, and then of the female.

The nurseries for males of noble or eminent birth are provided with grave and learned professors, and their several deputies. The clothes and food of the children are plain and simple. They are bred up in the principles of honor, justice, courage, modesty, clemency, religion, and love of their country; they are always employed in some business, except in the times of eating and sleeping, which are very short, and two hours for diversions, consisting of bodily exercises. They are dressed by men until four years of age, and then are obliged to dress themselves, although their quality be ever so great; and the women attendants, who are aged proportionably to ours at fifty, perform only the most menial offices. They are never suffered to converse with servants, but go together in small or greater numbers to take their diversions, and always in the presence of a professor, or one of his deputies; whereby they avoid those early bad impressions of folly and vice to which our children are subject. Their parents are suffered to see them only twice a year; the visit is not to last above an hour; they are allowed to kiss the child at meeting and parting; but a professor, who always standeth by on those occasions, will not suffer them to whisper, or use any fondling expressions, or bring any presents of toys, sweetmeats, and the like.

The pension from each family for the education and entertainment<sup>3</sup> of a child, upon failure of due payment, is levied by the Emperor's officers.

The nurseries for children of ordinary gentlemen, merchants, traders, and handicrafts, are managed proportionably after the same manner; only those designed for trades are put out apprentices at

seven years old; whereas those of persons of quality continue in their exercises until fifteen, which answers to one and twenty with us: but the confinement is gradually lessened for the last three years.

In the female nurseries, the young girls of quality are educated much like the males, only they are dressed by orderly servants of their own sex, but always in the presence of a professor or deputy, until they come to dress themselves, which is at five years old. And if it be found that these nurses ever presume to entertain the girls with frightful or foolish stories, or the common follies practiced by chambermaids among us, they are publicly whipped thrice about the city, imprisoned for a year, and banished for life to the most desolate parts of the country. Thus the young ladies there are as much ashamed of being cowards and fools as the men; and despise all personal ornaments beyond decency and cleanliness: neither did I perceive any difference in their education, made by their difference of sex, only that the exercises of the females were not altogether so robust; and that some rules were given them relating to domestic life, and a smaller compass of learning was enjoined them: for their maxim is, that among people of quality, a wife should be always a reasonable and agreeable companion, because she cannot always be young. When the girls are twelve years old, which among them is the marriageable age, their parents or guardians take them home, with great expressions of gratitude to the professors, and seldom without tears of the young lady and her companions.

In the nurseries of females of the meaner sort, the children are instructed in all kinds of works proper for their sex, and their several degrees:<sup>4</sup> those intended for apprentices are dismissed at seven years old, the rest are kept to eleven.

The meaner families who have children at these nurseries are obliged, besides their annual pension, which is as low as possible, to return to the steward of the nursery a small monthly share of their gettings, to be a portion for the child; and therefore all parents are limited in their expenses by the law. For the Lilliputians think nothing can be more unjust, than that people, in subservience to their own



appetites, should bring children into the world, and leave the burthen of supporting them on the public. As to persons of quality, they give security to appropriate a certain sum for each child, suitable to their condition; and these funds are always managed with good husbandry, and the most exact justice.

The cottagers and laborers keep their children at home, their business being only to till and cultivate the earth; and therefore their education is of little consequence to the public; but the old and diseased among them are supported by hospitals: for begging is a trade unknown in this empire.

And here it may perhaps divert the curious reader, to give some account of my domestic,<sup>5</sup> and my manner of living in this country, during a residence of nine months and thirteen days. Having a head mechanically turned, and being likewise forced by necessity, I had made for myself a table and chair convenient enough, out of the largest trees in the royal park. Two hundred sempstresses were employed to make me shirts, and linen for my bed and table, all of the strongest and coarsest kind they could get; which, however, they were forced to quilt together in several folds; for the thickest was some degrees finer than lawn. Their linen is usually three inches wide, and three foot make a piece. The sempstresses took my measure as I lay on the ground, one standing at my neck, and another at my mid-leg, with a strong cord extended, that each held by the end, while the third measured the length of the cord with a rule of an inch long. Then they measured my right thumb, and desired no more; for by a mathematical computation, that twice round the thumb is one round the wrist, and so on to the neck and the waist; and by the help of my old shirt, which I displayed on the ground before them for a pattern, they fitted me exactly. Three hundred tailors were employed in the same manner to make me clothes; but they had another contrivance for taking my measure. I kneeled down, and they raised a ladder from the ground to my neck; upon this ladder one of them mounted, and let fall a plumb-line from my collar to the floor, which just answered the length of my coat; but my waist and arms I measured myself. When my clothes were



finished, which was done in my house (for the largest of theirs would not have been able to hold them), they looked like the patchwork made by the ladies in England, only that mine were all of a color.

I had three hundred cooks to dress my victuals, in little convenient huts built about my house, where they and their families lived, and prepared me two dishes apiece. I took up twenty waiters in my hand, and placed them on the table; an hundred more attended below on the ground, some with dishes of meat, and some with barrels of wine, and other liquors, slung on their shoulders; all which the waiters above drew up as I wanted, in a very ingenious manner, by certain cords, as we draw the bucket up a well in Europe. A dish of their meat was a good mouthful, and a barrel of their liquor a reasonable draught. Their mutton yields to ours, but their beef is excellent. I have had a sirloin so large, that I have been forced to make three bites of it; but this is rare. My servants were astonished to see me eat it bones and all, as in our country we do the leg of a lark. Their geese and turkeys I usually eat at a mouthful, and I must confess they far exceed ours. Of their smaller fowl I could take up twenty or thirty at the end of my knife.

One day his Imperial Majesty, being informed of my way of living, desired that himself and his royal consort, with the young princes of the blood of both sexes, might have the happiness (as he was pleased to call it) of dining with me. They came accordingly, and I placed them upon chairs of state on my table, just over against me, with their guards about them. Flimnap the Lord High Treasurer attended there likewise, with his white staff; and I observed he often looked on me with a sour countenance, which I would not seem to regard, but eat more than usual, in honor to my dear country, as well as to fill the court with admiration. I have some private reasons to believe, that this visit from his Majesty gave Flimnap an opportunity of doing me ill offices to his master. That minister had always been my secret enemy, although he outwardly caressed me more than was usual to the moroseness of his nature. He represented to the Emperor the low condition of his treasury; that

he was forced to take up money at great discount; that exchequer bills<sup>6</sup> would not circulate under nine per cent below par; that I had cost his Majesty above a million and a half of *sprugs* (their greatest gold coin, about the bigness of a spangle); and upon the whole, that it would be advisable in the Emperor to take the first fair occasion of dismissing me.

I am here obliged to vindicate the reputation of an excellent lady, who was an innocent sufferer upon my account. The Treasurer took a fancy to be jealous of his wife, from the malice of some evil tongues, who informed him that her Grace had taken a violent affection for my person; and the court-scandal ran for some time that she once came privately to my lodging. This I solemnly declare to be a most infamous falsehood, without any grounds, farther than that her Grace was pleased to treat me with all innocent marks of freedom and friendship. I own she came often to my house, but always publicly, nor ever without three more in the coach, who were usually her sister and young daughter, and some particular acquaintance; but this was common to many other ladies of the court. And I still appeal to my servants round, whether they at any time saw a coach at my door without knowing what persons were in it. On those occasions, when a servant had given me notice, my custom was to go immediately to the door; and, after paying my respects, to take up the coach and two horses very carefully in my hands (for if there were six horses, the postillion always unharnessed four) and place them on a table, where I had fixed a moveable rim quite round, of five inches high, to prevent accidents. And I have often had four coaches and horses at once on my table full of company, while I sat in my chair leaning my face towards them; and when I was engaged with one set, the coachmen would gently drive the others round my table. I have passed many an afternoon very agreeably in these conversations. But I defy the Treasurer, or his two informers (I will name them, and let them make their best of it) Clustril and Drunlo, to prove that any person ever came to me *incognito*, except the Secretary Reldresal, who was sent by express command of his Imperial Majesty, as I have before

related. I should not have dwelt so long upon this particular, if it had not been a point wherein the reputation of a great lady is so nearly concerned, to say nothing of my own; although I had the honor to be a *Nardac*, which the Treasurer himself is not; for all the world knows he is only a *Clumglum*, a title inferior by one degree, as that of a marquis is to a duke in England; yet I allow he preceded me in right of his post. These false informations, which I afterwards came to the knowledge of, by an accident not proper to mention, made the Treasurer show his lady for some time an ill countenance, and me a worse; for although he was at last undeceived and reconciled to her, yet I lost all credit with him; and found my interest decline very fast with the Emperor himself, who was indeed too much governed by that favorite.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Plucking.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Plants.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Swift's invention.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The (beliefs of the) common people.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Fully.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Social position.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Agricultural workers, peasants.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Professional teachers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sustenance.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Various social ranks.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Household.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Government bills of credit. Walpole was noted as a canny financier.[Return to reference 6](#)

CHAPTER 7. *The author, being informed of a design to accuse him of high treason, makes his escape to Blefuscu. His reception there.*

Before I proceed to give an account of my leaving this kingdom, it may be proper to inform the reader of a private intrigue which had been for two months forming against me.

I had been hitherto all my life a stranger to courts, for which I was unqualified by the meanness of my condition. I had indeed heard and read enough of the dispositions of great princes and ministers; but never expected to have found such terrible effects of them in so remote a country, governed, as I thought, by very different maxims from those in Europe.

When I was just preparing to pay my attendance on the Emperor of Blefuscu, a considerable person at court (to whom I had been very serviceable at a time when he lay under the highest displeasure of his Imperial Majesty) came to my house very privately at night in a close chair, and without sending his name, desired admittance. The chairmen were dismissed; I put the chair, with his Lordship in it, into my coat-pocket; and giving orders to a trusty servant to say I was indisposed and gone to sleep, I fastened the door of my house, placed the chair on the table, according to my usual custom, and sat down by it. After the common salutations were over, observing his Lordship's countenance full of concern, and enquiring into the reason, he desired I would hear him with patience, in a matter that highly concerned my honor and my life. His speech was to the following effect, for I took notes of it as soon as he left me.

You are to know, said he, that several committees of council have been lately called in the most private manner on your account: and it is but two days since his Majesty came to a full resolution.

You are very sensible that Skyresh Bolgolam (*Galbet*, or High Admiral) hath been your mortal enemy almost ever since your arrival. His original reasons I know not; but his hatred is much increased since your great success against Blefuscu, by which his glory, as Admiral, is obscured. This lord, in conjunction with Flimnap the High Treasurer, whose enmity against you is notorious on

account of his lady, Limtoc the General, Lalcon the Chamberlain, and Balmuff the Grand Justiciary, have prepared articles of impeachment against you, for treason, and other capital crimes.<sup>7</sup>

This preface made me so impatient, being conscious of my own merits and innocence, that I was going to interrupt; when he entreated me to be silent, and thus proceeded.

Out of gratitude for the favors you have done me, I procured information of the whole proceedings, and a copy of the articles, wherein I venture my head for your service.

### ***Articles of Impeachment against Quinbus Flestrin (the Man-Mountain).***

#### **ARTICLE 1**

Whereas, by a statute made in the reign of his Imperial Majesty Calin Deffar Plune, it is enacted, that whoever shall make water within the precincts of the royal palace shall be liable to the pains and penalties of high treason: notwithstanding, the said Quinbus Flestrin, in open breach of the said law, under color of extinguishing the fire kindled in the apartment of his Majesty's most dear imperial consort, did maliciously, traitorously, and devilishly, by discharge of his urine, put out the said fire kindled in the said apartment, lying and being within the precincts of the said royal palace; against the statute in that case provided, etc., against the duty, etc.

#### **ARTICLE 2**

That the said Quinbus Flestrin, having brought the imperial fleet of Blefuscu into the royal port, and being afterwards commanded by his Imperial Majesty to seize all the other ships of the said empire of Blefuscu, and reduce that empire to a province, to be governed by a viceroy from hence; and to destroy and put to death not only all the Big-Indian exiles, but likewise all the people of that empire who would not immediately forsake

the Big-Endian heresy: he, the said Flestrin, like a false traitor against his most auspicious, serene, Imperial Majesty, did petition to be excused from the said service, upon pretense of unwillingness to force the consciences, or destroy the liberties and lives of an innocent people.

### **ARTICLE 3**

That, whereas certain ambassadors arrived from the court of Blefuscu to sue for peace in his Majesty's court: he the said Flestrin did, like a false traitor, aid, abet, comfort, and divert the said ambassadors; although he knew them to be servants to a prince who was lately an open enemy to his Imperial Majesty, and in open war against his said Majesty.

### **ARTICLE 4**

That the said Quinbus Flestrin, contrary to the duty of a faithful subject, is now preparing to make a voyage to the court and empire of Blefuscu, for which he hath received only verbal license from his Imperial Majesty; and under color of the said license, doth falsely and traitorously intend to take the said voyage, and thereby to aid, comfort, and abet the Emperor of Blefuscu, so late an enemy, and in open war with his Imperial Majesty aforesaid.

There are some other articles, but these are the most important, of which I have read you an abstract.

In the several debates upon this impeachment, it must be confessed that his Majesty gave many marks of his great *lenity*; often urging the services you had done him, and endeavoring to extenuate your crimes. The Treasurer and Admiral insisted that you should be put to the most painful and ignominious death, by setting fire on your house at night; and the General was to attend with twenty thousand men armed with poisoned arrows, to shoot you on the face and hands. Some of your servants were to have private

orders to strew a poisonous juice on your shirts and sheets, which would soon make you tear your own flesh, and die in the utmost torture. The General came into the same opinion; so that for a long time there was a majority against you. But his Majesty resolving, if possible, to spare your life, at last brought off<sup>8</sup> the Chamberlain.

Upon this incident, Reldresal, Principal Secretary for Private Affairs, who always approved<sup>9</sup> himself your true friend, was commanded by the Emperor to deliver his opinion, which he accordingly did; and therein justified the good thoughts you have of him. He allowed your crimes to be great; but that still there was room for mercy, the most commendable virtue in a prince, and for which his Majesty was so justly celebrated. He said, the friendship between you and him was so well known to the world, that perhaps the most honorable board might think him partial: however, in obedience to the command he had received, he would freely offer his sentiments. That if his Majesty, in consideration of your services, and pursuant to his own merciful disposition, would please to spare your life, and only give order to put out both your eyes, he humbly conceived, that by this expedient justice might in some measure be satisfied, and all the world would applaud the *lenity* of the Emperor, as well as the fair and generous proceedings of those who have the honor to be his counselors. That the loss of your eyes would be no impediment to your bodily strength, by which you might still be useful to his Majesty. That blindness is an addition to courage, by concealing dangers from us; that the fear you had for your eyes was the greatest difficulty in bringing over the enemy's fleet; and it would be sufficient for you to see by the eyes of the ministers, since the greatest princes do no more.

This proposal was received with the utmost disapprobation by the whole board. Bolgolam, the Admiral, could not preserve his temper; but rising up in fury, said, he wondered how the Secretary durst presume to give his opinion for preserving the life of a traitor: that the services you had performed were, by all true reasons of state, the great aggravation of your crimes; that you, who were able to extinguish the fire by discharge of urine in her Majesty's

apartment (which he mentioned with horror), might, at another time, raise an inundation by the same means, to drown the whole palace; and the same strength which enabled you to bring over the enemy's fleet might serve, upon the first discontent, to carry it back: that he had good reasons to think you were a Big-Indian in your heart; and as treason begins in the heart before it appears in overt acts, so he accused you as a traitor on that account, and therefore insisted you should be put to death.

The Treasurer was of the same opinion; he showed to what straits his Majesty's revenue was reduced by the charge of maintaining you, which would soon grow insupportable: that the Secretary's expedient of putting out your eyes was so far from being a remedy against this evil, that it would probably increase it; as it is manifest from the common practice of blinding some kind of fowl, after which they fed the faster, and grew sooner fat: that his sacred Majesty, and the council, who are your judges, were in their own consciences fully convinced of your guilt; which was a sufficient argument to condemn you to death, without the formal proofs required by the strict letter of the law.

But his Imperial Majesty, fully determined against capital punishment, was graciously pleased to say, that since the council thought the loss of your eyes too easy a censure, some other may be inflicted hereafter. And your friend the Secretary humbly desiring to be heard again, in answer to what the Treasurer had objected concerning the great charge his Majesty was at in maintaining you, said, that his Excellency, who had the sole disposal of the Emperor's revenue, might easily provide against this evil, by gradually lessening your establishment; by which, for want of sufficient food, you would grow weak and faint, and lose your appetite, and consequently decay and consume in a few months; neither would the stench of your carcass be then so dangerous, when it should become more than half diminished; and immediately upon your death, five or six thousand of his Majesty's subjects might, in two or three days, cut your flesh from your bones, take it away by cart-loads, and bury it in



distant parts to prevent infection; leaving the skeleton as a monument of admiration to posterity.

Thus by the great friendship of the Secretary, the whole affair was compromised. It was strictly enjoined, that the project of starving you by degrees should be kept a secret; but the sentence of putting out your eyes was entered on the books; none dissenting except Bolgolam the Admiral, who being a creature of the Empress, was perpetually instigated by her Majesty to insist upon your death; she having borne perpetual malice against you, on account of that infamous and illegal method you took to extinguish the fire in her apartment.

In three days your friend the Secretary will be directed to come to your house, and read before you the articles of impeachment; and then to signify the great lenity and favor of his Majesty and council; whereby you are only condemned to the loss of your eyes, which his Majesty doth not question you will gratefully and humbly submit to; and twenty of his Majesty's surgeons will attend, in order to see the operation well performed, by discharging very sharp-pointed arrows into the balls of your eyes, as you lie on the ground.

I leave to your prudence what measures you will take; and to avoid suspicion, I must immediately return in as private a manner as I came.

His Lordship did so, and I remained alone, under many doubts and perplexities of mind.

It was a custom introduced by this prince and his ministry (very different, as I have been assured, from the practices of former times), that after the court had decreed any cruel execution, either to gratify the monarch's resentment, or the malice of a favorite, the Emperor always made a speech to his whole council, expressing his great lenity and tenderness, as qualities known and confessed by all the world. This speech was immediately published through the kingdom; nor did any thing terrify the people so much as those encomiums on his Majesty's mercy; because it was observed, that the more these praises were enlarged and insisted on, the more inhuman was the punishment, and the sufferer more innocent. Yet

as to myself, I must confess, having never been designed for a courtier, either by my birth or education, I was so ill a judge of things, that I could not discover the lenity and favor of this sentence, but conceived it (perhaps erroneously) rather to be rigorous than gentle. I sometimes thought of standing my trial; for although I could not deny the facts alleged in the several articles, yet I hoped they would admit of some extenuations. But having in my life perused many state trials, which I ever observed to terminate as the judges thought fit to direct, I durst not rely on so dangerous a decision, in so critical a juncture, and against such powerful enemies. Once I was strongly bent upon resistance: for while I had liberty, the whole strength of that empire could hardly subdue me, and I might easily with stones pelt the metropolis to pieces; but I soon rejected that project with horror, by remembering the oath I had made to the Emperor, the favors I received from him, and the high title of *Nardac* he conferred upon me. Neither had I so soon learned the gratitude of courtiers, to persuade myself that his Majesty's present severities acquitted me of all past obligations.

At last I fixed upon a resolution, for which it is probable I may incur some censure, and not unjustly; for I confess I owe the preserving my eyes, and consequently my liberty, to my own great rashness and want of experience: because if I had then known the nature of princes and ministers, which I have since observed in many other courts, and their methods of treating criminals less obnoxious than myself, I should with great alacrity and readiness have submitted to so *easy* a punishment. But hurried on by the precipitancy of youth, and having his Imperial Majesty's license to pay my attendance upon the Emperor of Blefuscu, I took this opportunity, before the three days were elapsed, to send a letter to my friend the Secretary, signifying my resolution of setting out that morning for Blefuscu,<sup>1</sup> pursuant to the leave I had got; and without waiting for an answer, I went to that side of the island where our fleet lay. I seized a large man of war, tied a cable to the prow, and lifting up the anchors, I stripped myself, put my clothes (together with my coverlet, which I carried under my arm) into the vessel; and

drawing it after me, between wading and swimming, arrived at the royal port of Blefuscu, where the people had long expected me. They lent me two guides to direct me to the capital city, which is of the same name; I held them in my hands until I came within two hundred yards of the gate; and desired them to signify my arrival to one of the secretaries, and let him know, I there waited his Majesty's commands. I had an answer in about an hour, that his Majesty, attended by the royal family, and great officers of the court, was coming out to receive me. I advanced a hundred yards; the Emperor, and his train, alighted from their horses, the Empress and ladies from their coaches; and I did not perceive they were in any fright or concern. I lay on the ground to kiss his Majesty's and the Empress's hand. I told his Majesty that I was come according to my promise, and with the license of the Emperor my master, to have the honor of seeing so mighty a monarch, and to offer him any service in my power, consistent with my duty to my own prince; not mentioning a word of my disgrace, because I had hitherto no regular information of it, and might suppose myself wholly ignorant of any such design; neither could I reasonably conceive that the Emperor would discover the secret while I was out of his power: wherein, however, it soon appeared I was deceived.

I shall not trouble the reader with the particular account of my reception at this court, which was suitable to the generosity of so great a prince; nor of the difficulties I was in for want of a house and bed, being forced to lie on the ground, wrapped up in my coverlet.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: After the Whigs had investigated Oxford and Bolingbroke, both were impeached for high treason, on charges of being sympathetic to the Jacobites and the French.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Won over.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Proved.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Before his trial for treason could be held, Bolingbroke had escaped to France.[Return to reference 1](#)

CHAPTER 8. *The author, by a lucky accident, finds means to leave Blefuscu; and, after some difficulties, returns safe to his native country.*

Three days after my arrival, walking out of curiosity to the northeast coast of the island, I observed, about half a league off, in the sea, somewhat that looked like a boat overturned. I pulled off my shoes and stockings, and wading two or three hundred yards, I found the object to approach nearer by force of the tide; and then plainly saw it to be a real boat, which I supposed might, by some tempest, have been driven from a ship. Whereupon I returned immediately towards the city, and desired his Imperial Majesty to lend me twenty of the tallest vessels he had left after the loss of his fleet, and three thousand seamen under the command of his Vice Admiral. This fleet sailed round, while I went back the shortest way to the coast where I first discovered the boat; I found the tide had driven it still nearer; the seamen were all provided with cordage, which I had beforehand twisted to a sufficient strength. When the ships came up, I stripped myself, and waded till I came within an hundred yards of the boat; after which I was forced to swim till I got up to it. The seamen threw me the end of the cord, which I fastened to a hole in the forepart of the boat, and the other end to a man of war: but I found all my labor to little purpose; for being out of my depth, I was not able to work. In this necessity, I was forced to swim behind, and push the boat forwards as often as I could, with one of my hands; and the tide favoring me, I advanced so far, that I could just hold up my chin and feel the ground. I rested two or three minutes, and then gave the boat another shove, and so on till the sea was no higher than my armpits. And now the most laborious part being over, I took out my other cables which were stowed in one of the ships, and fastening them first to the boat, and then to nine of the vessels which attended me, the wind being favorable, the seamen towed, and I shoved till we arrived within forty yards of the shore; and waiting till the tide was out, I got dry to the boat, and by the assistance of two thousand men, with ropes and engines, I

made a shift to turn it on its bottom, and found it was but little damaged.

I shall not trouble the reader with the difficulties I was under by the help of certain paddles, which cost me ten days making, to get my boat to the royal port of Blefuscu; where a mighty concourse of people appeared upon my arrival, full of wonder at the sight of so prodigious a vessel. I told the Emperor that my good fortune had thrown this boat in my way, to carry me to some place from whence I might return into my native country; and begged his Majesty's orders for getting materials to fit it up, together with license to depart; which, after some kind expostulations, he was pleased to grant.

I did very much wonder, in all this time, not to have heard of any express relating to me from our Emperor to the court of Blefuscu. But I was afterwards given privately to understand, that his Imperial Majesty, never imagining I had the least notice of his designs, believed I was only gone to Blefuscu in performance of my promise, according to the license he had given me, which was well known at our court; and would return in a few days when that ceremony was ended. But he was at last in pain at my long absence; and, after consulting with the Treasurer, and the rest of that cabal, a person of quality was dispatched with the copy of the articles against me. This envoy had instructions to represent to the monarch of Blefuscu the great lenity of his master, who was content to punish me no further than with the loss of my eyes; that I had fled from justice, and if I did not return in two hours, I should be deprived of my title of *Nardac*, and declared a traitor. The envoy further added, that in order to maintain the peace and amity between both empires, his master expected, that his brother of Blefuscu would give orders to have me sent back to Lilliput, bound hand and foot, to be punished as a traitor.

The Emperor of Blefuscu, having taken three days to consult, returned an answer consisting of many civilities and excuses. He said, that as for sending me bound, his brother knew it was impossible; that although I had deprived him of his fleet, yet he

owed great obligations to me for many good offices I had done him in making the peace. That however, both their Majesties would soon be made easy; for I had found a prodigious vessel on the shore, able to carry me on the sea, which he had given order to fit up with my own assistance and direction; and he hoped in a few weeks both empires would be freed from so insupportable an incumbrance.

With this answer the envoy returned to Lilliput, and the monarch of Blefuscu related to me all that had passed, offering me at the same time (but under the strictest confidence) his gracious protection, if I would continue in his service; wherein although I believed him sincere, yet I resolved never more to put any confidence in princes or ministers, where I could possibly avoid it; and therefore, with all due acknowledgements for his favorable intentions, I humbly begged to be excused. I told him, that since fortune, whether good or evil, had thrown a vessel in my way, I was resolved to venture myself in the ocean, rather than be an occasion of difference between two such mighty monarchs. Neither did I find the Emperor at all displeased; and I discovered by a certain accident, that he was very glad of my resolution, and so were most of his ministers.

These considerations moved me to hasten my departure somewhat sooner than I intended; to which the court, impatient to have me gone, very readily contributed. Five hundred workmen were employed to make two sails to my boat, according to my directions, by quilting thirteen fold of their strongest linen together. I was at the pains of making ropes and cables, by twisting ten, twenty or thirty of the thickest and strongest of theirs. A great stone that I happened to find, after a long search by the seashore, served me for an anchor. I had the tallow of three hundred cows for greasing my boat, and other uses. I was at incredible pains in cutting down some of the largest timber trees for oars and masts, wherein I was, however, much assisted by his Majesty's ship-carpenters, who helped me in smoothing them, after I had done the rough work.

In about a month, when all was prepared, I sent to receive his Majesty's commands, and to take my leave. The Emperor and royal

family came out of the palace; I lay down on my face to kiss his hand, which he very graciously gave me: so did the Empress, and young princes of the blood. His Majesty presented me with fifty purses of two hundred *sprugs* apiece, together with his picture at full length, which I put immediately into one of my gloves, to keep it from being hurt. The ceremonies at my departure were too many to trouble the reader with at this time.

I stored the boat with the carcasses of an hundred oxen, and three hundred sheep, with bread and drink proportionable, and as much meat ready dressed as four hundred cooks could provide. I took with me six cows and two bulls alive, with as many ewes and rams, intending to carry them into my own country, and propagate the breed. And to feed them on board, I had a good bundle of hay, and a bag of corn.<sup>2</sup> I would gladly have taken a dozen of the natives; but this was a thing the Emperor would by no means permit; and besides a diligent search into my pockets, his Majesty engaged my honor not to carry away any of his subjects, although with their own consent and desire.

Having thus prepared all things as well as I was able, I set sail on the twenty-fourth day of September, 1701, at six in the morning; and when I had gone about four leagues to the northward, the wind being at southeast, at six in the evening, I descried a small island about half a league to the northwest. I advanced forward, and cast anchor on the lee-side of the island, which seemed to be uninhabited. I then took some refreshment, and went to my rest. I slept well, and as I conjecture at least six hours; for I found the day broke in two hours after I awaked. It was a clear night; I eat my breakfast before the sun was up; and heaving anchor, the wind being favorable, I steered the same course that I had done the day before, wherein I was directed by my pocket compass. My intention was to reach, if possible, one of those islands which I had reason to believe lay to the northeast of Van Diemen's Land. I discovered nothing all that day; but upon the next, about three in the afternoon, when I had by my computation made twenty-four leagues from Blefuscu, I descried a sail steering to the southeast; my course



was due east. I hailed her, but could get no answer; yet I found I gained upon her, for the wind slackened. I made all the sail I could, and in half an hour she spied me, then hung out her ancient,<sup>3</sup> and discharged a gun. It is not easy to express the joy I was in upon the unexpected hope of once more seeing my beloved country, and the dear pledges<sup>4</sup> I had left in it. The ship slackened her sails, and I came up with her between five and six in the evening, September 26; but my heart leapt within me to see her English colors. I put my cows and sheep into my coat-pockets and got on board with all my little cargo of provisions. The vessel was an English merchantman, returning from Japan by the North and South Seas;<sup>5</sup> the captain, Mr. John Biddel of Deptford, a very civil man, and an excellent sailor. We were now in the latitude of 30 degrees south; there were about fifty men in the ship; and here I met an old comrade of mine, one Peter Williams, who gave me a good character to the captain. This gentleman treated me with kindness, and desired I would let him know what place I came from last, and whither I was bound; which I did in few words; but he thought I was raving, and that the dangers I underwent had disturbed my head; whereupon I took my black cattle and sheep out of my pocket, which, after great astonishment, clearly convinced him of my veracity. I then showed him the gold given me by the Emperor of Blefuscu, together with his Majesty's picture at full length, and some other rarities of that country. I gave him two purses of two hundred *sprugs* each, and promised, when we arrived in England, to make him a present of a cow and a sheep big with young.

I shall not trouble the reader with a particular account of this voyage; which was very prosperous for the most part. We arrived in the Downs<sup>6</sup> on the 13th of April, 1702. I had only one misfortune, that the rats on board carried away one of my sheep; I found her bones in a hole, picked clean from the flesh. The rest of my cattle I got safe on shore, and set them a grazing in a bowling-green at Greenwich, where the fineness of the grass made them feed very heartily, though I had always feared the contrary; neither could I possibly have preserved them in so long a voyage, if the captain had

not allowed me some of his best biscuit, which rubbed to powder, and mingled with water, was their constant food. The short time I continued in England, I made a considerable profit by showing my cattle to many persons of quality, and others: and before I began my second voyage, I sold them for six hundred pounds. Since my last return, I find the breed is considerably increased, especially the sheep; which I hope will prove much to the advantage of the woollen manufacture, by the fineness of the fleeces.

I stayed but two months with my wife and family; for my insatiable desire of seeing foreign countries would suffer me to continue no longer. I left fifteen hundred pounds with my wife, and fixed her in a good house at Redriff. My remaining stock I carried with me, part in money, and part in goods, in hopes to improve my fortunes. My eldest uncle, John, had left me an estate in land, near Epping, of about thirty pounds a year; and I had a long lease of the Black Bull in Fetter Lane, which yielded me as much more: so that I was not in any danger of leaving my family upon the parish.<sup>7</sup> My son Johnny, named so after his uncle, was at the grammar school, and a towardly<sup>8</sup> child. My daughter Betty (who is now well married, and has children) was then at her needlework. I took leave of my wife, and boy and girl, with tears on both sides; and went on board the *Adventure*, a merchant-ship of three hundred tons, bound for Surat, Captain John Nicholas of Liverpool, Commander. But my account of this voyage must be referred to the second part of my *Travels*.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Generic term for any cereal or grain crop (here, wheat).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Flag.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Hostages (his family).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: North and South Pacific.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A rendezvous for ships off the southeast coast of England.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: On welfare (living on charity given by the parish).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Promising.[Return to reference 8](#)

## ***Part 2. A Voyage to Brobdingnag***



Discovered, AD 1703

NORTH AMERICA

Straits of Annian

C Blanco

S<sup>t</sup> Sebastian

C Mendocino

P<sup>to</sup> S<sup>t</sup> Francis Drake

P Monterey

NE  
ALBIO

Mount  
St Martin





CHAPTER 1. *A great storm described. The longboat sent to fetch water; the Author goes with it to discover the country. He is left on shore, is seized by one of the natives, and carried to a farmer's house. His reception there, with several accidents that happened there. A description of the inhabitants.*

Having been condemned by nature and fortune to an active and restless life, in ten months after my return I again left my native country, and took shipping in the Downs on the 20th day of June, 1702, in the *Adventure*, Captain John Nicholas, a Cornish man, Commander, bound for Surat.<sup>9</sup> We had a very prosperous gale till we arrived at the Cape of Good Hope, where we landed for fresh water, but discovering a leak we unshipped our goods and wintered there; for the Captain falling sick of an ague, we could not leave the Cape till the end of March. We then set sail, and had a good voyage till we passed the Straits of Madagascar; but having got northward of that island, and to about five degrees south latitude, the winds, which in those seas are observed to blow a constant equal gale between the north and west from the beginning of December to the beginning of May, on the 19th of April began to blow with much greater violence and more westerly than usual, continuing so far twenty days together, during which time we were driven a little to the east of the Molucca Islands and about three degrees northward of the Line, as our Captain found by an observation he took the 2nd of May, at which time the wind ceased, and it was a perfect calm, whereat I was not a little rejoiced. But he, being a man well experienced in the navigation of those seas, bid us all prepare against a storm, which accordingly happened the day following: for a southern wind, called the southern monsoon, began to set in.

Finding it was likely to overblow,<sup>1</sup> we took in our spritsail, and stood by to hand the foresail; but making foul weather, we looked the guns were all fast, and handed the mizzen. The ship lay very broad off, so we thought it better spooning before the sea, than trying or hulling. We reefed the foresail and set him, we hauled aft the foresheet; the helm was hard aweather. The ship wore bravely.

We belayed the fore-downhaul; but the sail was split, and we hauled down the yard and got the sail into the ship, and unbound all the things clear of it. It was a very fierce storm; the sea broke strange and dangerous. We hauled off upon the lanyard of the whipstaff, and helped the man at helm. We would not get down our topmast, but let all stand, because she scudded before the sea very well, and we knew that the topmast being aloft, the ship was the wholesomer, and made better way through the sea, seeing we had searoom. When the storm was over, we set foresail and mainsail, and brought the ship to. Then we set the mizzen, main topsail and the fore topsail. Our course was east-northeast, the wind was at southwest. We got the starboard tacks aboard, we cast off our weather braces and lifts; we set in the lee braces, and hauled forward by the weather bowlings, and hauled them tight, and belayed them, and hauled over the mizzen tack to windward, and kept her full and by as near as she would lie.

During this storm, which was followed by a strong wind west-southwest, we were carried by my computation about five hundred leagues to the east, so that the oldest sailor on board could not tell in what part of the world we were. Our provisions held out well, our ship was staunch, and our crew all in good health; but we lay in the utmost distress for water. We thought it best to hold on the same course rather than turn more northerly, which might have brought us to the northwest parts of Great Tartary, and into the frozen sea.

On the 16th day of June, 1703, a boy on the topmast discovered land. On the 17th we came in full view of a great island or continent (for we knew not whether) on the south side whereof was a small neck of land jutting out into the sea, and a creek<sup>2</sup> too shallow to hold a ship of above one hundred tons. We cast anchor within a league of this creek, and our Captain sent a dozen of his men well armed in the longboat, with vessels for water if any could be found. I desired his leave to go with them that I might see the country and make what discoveries I could. When we came to land we saw no river or spring, nor any sign of inhabitants. Our men therefore wandered on the shore to find out some fresh water near the sea,



and I walked alone about a mile on the other side, where I observed the country all barren and rocky. I now began to be weary, and seeing nothing to entertain my curiosity, I returned gently down towards the creek; and the sea being full in my view, I saw our men already got into the boat, and rowing for life to the ship. I was going to hollow after them, although it had been to little purpose, when I observed a huge creature walking after them in the sea as fast as he could; he waded not much deeper than his knees and took prodigious strides, but our men had the start of him half a league, and the sea thereabouts being full of sharp-pointed rocks, the monster was not able to overtake the boat. This I was afterwards told, for I durst not stay to see the issue of that adventure, but ran as fast as I could the way I first went, and then climbed up a steep hill, which gave me some prospect of the country. I found it fully cultivated; but that which first surprised me was the length of the grass, which, in those grounds that seemed to be kept for hay, was about twenty foot high.<sup>3</sup>

I fell into a highroad, for so I took it to be, although it served to the inhabitants only as a footpath through a field of barley. Here I walked on for some time, but could see little on either side, it being now near harvest, and the corn<sup>4</sup> rising at least forty foot. I was an hour walking to the end of this field, which was fenced in with a hedge of at least one hundred and twenty foot high, and the trees so lofty that I could make no computation of their altitude. There was a stile to pass from this field into the next: it had four steps, and a stone to cross over when you came to the utmost. It was impossible for me to climb this stile, because every step was six foot high, and the upper stone above twenty. I was endeavoring to find some gap in the hedge when I discovered one of the inhabitants in the next field advancing towards the stile, of the same size with him whom I saw in the sea pursuing our boat. He appeared as tall as an ordinary spire-steeple, and took about ten yards at every stride, as near as I could guess. I was struck with the utmost fear and astonishment, and ran to hide myself in the corn, from whence I saw him at the top of the stile, looking back into the next field on

the right hand; and heard him call in a voice many degrees louder than a speaking trumpet; but the noise was so high in the air that at first I certainly thought it was thunder. Whereupon seven monsters like himself came towards him with reaping hooks in their hands, each hook about the largeness of six scythes. These people were not so well clad as the first, whose servants or laborers they seemed to be. For, upon some words he spoke, they went to reap the corn in the field where I lay. I kept from them at as great a distance as I could, but was forced to move with extreme difficulty, for the stalks of the corn were sometimes not above a foot distant, so that I could hardly squeeze my body betwixt them. However, I made a shift to go forward till I came to a part of the field where the corn had been laid by the rain and wind; here it was impossible for me to advance a step, for the stalks were so interwoven that I could not creep through, and the beards of the fallen ears so strong and pointed that they pierced through my clothes into my flesh. At the same time I heard the reapers not above an hundred yards behind me. Being quite dispirited with toil, and wholly overcome by grief and despair, I lay down between two ridges and heartily wished I might there end my days. I bemoaned my desolate widow and fatherless children; I lamented my own folly and willfulness in attempting a second voyage against the advice of all my friends and relations. In this terrible agitation of mind, I could not forbear thinking of Lilliput, whose inhabitants looked upon me as the greatest prodigy that ever appeared in the world; where I was able to draw an imperial fleet in my hand, and perform those other actions which will be recorded forever in the chronicles of that empire, while posterity shall hardly believe them, although attested by millions. I reflected what a mortification it must prove to me to appear as inconsiderable in this nation as one single Lilliputian would be among us. But this I conceived was to be the least of my misfortunes; for as human creatures are observed to be more savage and cruel in proportion to their bulk, what could I expect but to be a morsel in the mouth of the first among these enormous barbarians who should happen to seize me? Undoubtedly philosophers are in the right when they tell us that nothing is great or little otherwise than by comparison. It

might have pleased fortune to let the Lilliputians find some nation where the people were as diminutive with respect to them as they were to me. And who knows but that even this prodigious race of mortals might be equally overmatched in some distant part of the world, whereof we have yet no discovery?

Scared and confounded as I was, I could not forbear going on with these reflections; when one of the reapers approaching within ten yards of the ridge where I lay, made me apprehend that with the next step I should be squashed to death under his foot, or cut in two with his reaping hook. And therefore when he was again about to move, I screamed as loud as fear could make me. Whereupon the huge creature trod short, and looking round about under him for some time, at last espied me as I lay on the ground. He considered a while with the caution of one who endeavors to lay hold on a small dangerous animal in such a manner that it shall not be able either to scratch or to bite him, as I myself have sometimes done with a weasel in England. At length he ventured to take me up behind by the middle between his forefinger and thumb, and brought me within three yards of his eyes, that he might behold my shape more perfectly. I guessed his meaning, and my good fortune gave me so much presence of mind that I resolved not to struggle in the least as he held me in the air about sixty foot from the ground, although he grievously pinched my sides, for fear I should slip through his fingers. All I ventured was to raise mine eyes towards the sun, and place my hands together in a supplicating posture, and to speak some words in an humble melancholy tone, suitable to the condition I then was in. For I apprehended every moment that he would dash me against the ground, as we usually do any little hateful animal which we have a mind to destroy. But my good star would have it that he appeared pleased with my voice and gestures, and began to look upon me as a curiosity, much wondering to hear me pronounce articulate words, although he could not understand them. In the meantime I was not able to forbear groaning and shedding tears and turning my head towards my sides, letting him know, as well as I could, how cruelly I was hurt by the pressure of his thumb and

finger. He seemed to apprehend my meaning; for, lifting up the lappet<sup>5</sup> of his coat, he put me gently into it, and immediately ran along with me to his master, who was a substantial farmer, and the same person I had first seen in the field.

The farmer having (as I supposed by their talk) received such an account of me as his servant could give him, took a piece of a small straw about the size of a walking staff, and therewith lifted up the lappets of my coat, which it seems he thought to be some kind of covering that nature had given me. He blew my hairs aside to take a better view of my face. He called his hinds<sup>6</sup> about him, and asked them (as I afterwards learned) whether they had ever seen in the fields any little creature that resembled me. He then placed me softly on the ground upon all four; but I got immediately up, and walked slowly backwards and forwards, to let those people see I had no intent to run away. They all sat down in a circle about me, the better to observe my motions. I pulled off my hat, and made a low bow towards the farmer; I fell on my knees, and lifted up my hands and eyes, and spoke several words as loud as I could; I took a purse of gold out of my pocket, and humbly presented it to him. He received it on the palm of his hand, then applied it close to his eye to see what it was, and afterwards turned it several times with the point of a pin (which he took out of his sleeve), but could make nothing of it. Whereupon I made a sign that he should place his hand on the ground; I then took the purse, and opening it, poured all the gold into his palm. There were six Spanish pieces of four pistoles each, beside twenty or thirty smaller coins. I saw him wet the tip of his little finger upon his tongue, and take up one of my largest pieces, and then another; but he seemed to be wholly ignorant what they were. He made me a sign to put them again into my purse, and the purse again into my pocket, which after offering to him several times, I thought it best to do.

The farmer by this time was convinced I must be a rational creature. He spoke often to me, but the sound of his voice pierced my ears like that of a water mill, yet his words were articulate enough. I answered as loud as I could in several languages, and he

often laid his ear within two yards of me, but all in vain, for we were wholly unintelligible to each other. He then sent his servants to their work, and taking his handkerchief out of his pocket, he doubled and spread it on his hand, which he placed flat on the ground with the palm upwards, making me a sign to step into it, as I could easily do, for it was not above a foot in thickness. I thought it my part to obey, and for fear of falling, laid myself at full length upon the handkerchief, with the remainder of which he lapped me up to the head for further security, and in this manner carried me home to his house. There he called his wife, and showed me to her; but she screamed and ran back as women in England do at the sight of a toad or a spider. However, when she had a while seen my behavior, and how well I observed the signs her husband made, she was soon reconciled, and by degrees grew extremely tender of me.

It was about twelve at noon, and a servant brought in dinner. It was only one substantial dish of meat (fit for the plain condition of an husbandman) in a dish of about four-and-twenty foot diameter. The company were the farmer and his wife, three children, and an old grandmother. When they were sat down, the farmer placed me at some distance from him on the table, which was thirty foot high from the floor. I was in a terrible fright, and kept as far as I could from the edge, for fear of falling. The wife minced a bit of meat, then crumbled some bread on a trencher, and placed it before me. I made her a low bow, took out my knife and fork, and fell to eat; which gave them exceeding delight. The mistress sent her maid for a small dram cup, which held about two gallons, and filled it with drink; I took up the vessel with much difficulty in both hands, and in a most respectful manner drank to her ladyship's health, expressing the words as loud as I could in English; which made the company laugh so heartily that I was almost deafened with the noise. This liquor tasted like a small cider,<sup>7</sup> and was not unpleasant. Then the master made me a sign to come to his trencher side; but as I walked on the table, being in great surprise all the time, as the indulgent reader will easily conceive and excuse, I happened to stumble against a crust, and fell flat on my face, but received no hurt. I got

up immediately, and observing the good people to be in much concern, I took my hat (which I held under my arm out of good manners) and waving it over my head, made three huzzas to show I had got no mischief by my fall. But advancing forwards toward my master (as I shall henceforth call him), his youngest son who sat next him, an arch boy of about ten years old, took me up by the legs, and held me so high in the air that I trembled every limb; but his father snatched me from him, and at the same time gave him such a box on the left ear as would have felled an European troop of horse to the earth, ordering him to be taken from the table. But being afraid the boy might owe me a spite, and well remembering how mischievous all children among us naturally are to sparrows, rabbits, young kittens, and puppy dogs, I fell on my knees, and pointing to the boy, made my master to understand, as well as I could, that I desired his son might be pardoned. The father complied, and the lad took his seat again; whereupon I went to him and kissed his hand, which my master took, and made him stroke me gently with it.

In the midst of dinner, my mistress's favorite cat leaped into her lap. I heard a noise behind me like that of a dozen stocking weavers at work; and turning my head, I found it proceeded from the purring of this animal, who seemed to be three times larger than an ox, as I computed by the view of her head and one of her paws, while her mistress was feeding and stroking her. The fierceness of this creature's countenance altogether discomposed me, although I stood at the farther end of the table, about fifty foot off, and although my mistress held her fast for fear she might give a spring and seize me in her talons. But it happened there was no danger, for the cat took not the least notice of me when my master placed me within three yards of her. And as I have been always told, and found true by experience in my travels, that flying or discovering<sup>8</sup> fear before a fierce animal is a certain way to make it pursue or attack you, so I resolved in this dangerous juncture to show no manner of concern. I walked with intrepidity five or six times before the very head of the cat, and came within half a yard of her; whereupon she

drew herself back, as if she were more afraid of me. I had less apprehension concerning the dogs, whereof three or four came into the room, as it is usual in farmers' houses; one of which was a mastiff, equal in bulk to four elephants, and a greyhound, somewhat taller than the mastiff, but not so large.

When dinner was almost done, the nurse came in with a child of a year old in her arms, who immediately spied me, and began a squall that you might have heard from London Bridge to Chelsea, after the usual oratory of infants, to get me for a plaything. The mother out of pure indulgence took me up, and put me towards the child, who presently seized me by the middle, and got my head in his mouth, where I roared so loud that the urchin was frightened and let me drop; and I should infallibly have broke my neck if the mother had not held her apron under me. The nurse to quiet her babe made use of a rattle, which was a kind of hollow vessel filled with great stones, and fastened by a cable to the child's waist: but all in vain, so that she was forced to apply the last remedy by giving it suck. I must confess no object ever disgusted me so much as the sight of her monstrous breast, which I cannot tell what to compare with so as to give the curious reader an idea of its bulk, shape, and color. It stood prominent six foot, and could not be less than sixteen in circumference. The nipple was about half the bigness of my head, and the hue both of that and the dug so varified with spots, pimples, and freckles that nothing could appear more nauseous: for I had a near sight of her, she sitting down the more conveniently to give suck, and I standing on the table. This made me reflect upon the fair skins of our English ladies, who appear so beautiful to us, only because they are of our own size, and their defects not to be seen but through a magnifying glass, where we find by experiment that the smoothest and whitest skins look rough and coarse and ill colored.

I remember when I was at Lilliput, the complexion of those diminutive people appeared to me the fairest in the world; and talking upon this subject with a person of learning there, who was an intimate friend of mine, he said that my face appeared much

fairer and smoother when he looked on me from the ground than it did upon a nearer view when I took him up in my hand and brought him close, which he confessed was at first a very shocking sight. He said he could discover great holes in my skin; that the stumps of my beard were ten times stronger than the bristles of a boar, and my complexion made up of several colors altogether disagreeable: although I must beg leave to say for myself that I am as fair as most of my sex and country and very little sunburnt by all my travels. On the other side, discoursing of the ladies in that Emperor's court, he used to tell me one had freckles, another too wide a mouth, a third too large a nose; nothing of which I was able to distinguish. I confess this reflection was obvious enough; which however I could not forbear, lest the reader might think those vast creatures were actually deformed: for I must do them justice to say they are a comely race of people; and particularly the features of my master's countenance, although he were but a farmer, when I beheld him from the height of sixty foot, appeared very well proportioned.

When dinner was done, my master went out to his laborers; and as I could discover by his voice and gesture, gave his wife a strict charge to take care of me. I was very much tired and disposed to sleep, which my mistress perceiving, she put me on her own bed, and covered me with a clean white handkerchief, but larger and coarser than the mainsail of a man-of-war.

I slept about two hours, and dreamed I was at home with my wife and children, which aggravated my sorrows when I awaked and found myself alone in a vast room, between two and three hundred foot wide, and above two hundred high, lying in a bed twenty yards wide. My mistress was gone about her household affairs, and had locked me in. The bed was eight yards from the floor. Some natural necessities required me to get down; I durst not presume to call, and if I had, it would have been in vain with such a voice as mine at so great a distance from the room where I lay to the kitchen where the family kept. While I was under these circumstances, two rats crept up the curtains, and ran smelling backwards and forwards on the bed. One of them came up almost to my face; whereupon I rose



in a fright, and drew out my hanger<sup>9</sup> to defend myself. These horrible animals had the boldness to attack me on both sides, and one of them held his forefeet at my collar; but I had the good fortune to rip up his belly before he could do me any mischief. He fell down at my feet; and the other seeing the fate of his comrade, made his escape, but not without one good wound on the back, which I gave him as he fled, and made the blood run trickling from him. After this exploit I walked gently to and fro on the bed, to recover my breath and loss of spirits. These creatures were of the size of a large mastiff, but infinitely more nimble and fierce; so that if I had taken off my belt before I went to sleep, I must have infallibly been torn to pieces and devoured. I measured the tail of the dead rat, and found it to be two yards long, wanting an inch; but it went against my stomach to drag the carcass off the bed, where it lay still bleeding; I observed it had yet some life, but with a strong slash cross the neck, I thoroughly dispatched it.

Soon after, my mistress came into the room, who seeing me all bloody, ran and took me up in her hand. I pointed to the dead rat, smiling and making other signs to show I was not hurt, whereat she was extremely rejoiced, calling the maid to take up the dead rat with a pair of tongs, and throw it out of the window. Then she set me on a table, where I showed her my hanger all bloody, and wiping it on the lapet of my coat, returned it to the scabbard. I was pressed to do more than one thing, which another could not do for me, and therefore endeavored to make my mistress understand that I desired to be set down on the floor; which after she had done, my bashfulness would not suffer me to express myself farther than by pointing to the door, and bowing several times. The good woman with much difficulty at last perceived what I would be at, and taking me up again in her hand, walked into the garden, where she set me down. I went on one side about two hundred yards; and beckoning to her not to look or to follow me, I hid myself between two leaves of sorrel, and there discharged the necessities of nature.

I hope the gentle reader will excuse me for dwelling on these and the like particulars, which however insignificant they may

appear to groveling vulgar minds, yet will certainly help a philosopher<sup>1</sup> to enlarge his thoughts and imagination, and apply them to the benefit of public as well as private life, which was my sole design in presenting this and other accounts of my travels to the world; wherein I have been chiefly studious of truth, without affecting any ornaments of learning or of style. But the whole scene of this voyage made so strong an impression on my mind, and is so deeply fixed in my memory, that in committing it to paper I did not omit one material circumstance; however, upon a strict review, I blotted out several passages of less moment which were in my first copy, for fear of being censured as tedious and trifling, whereof travelers are often, perhaps not without justice, accused.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: In India. The geography of the voyage (described next) is simple: The *Adventure*, after sailing up the east coast of Africa to about five degrees south of the equator (the "Line"), is blown past India into the Malay Archipelago, north of the islands of Buru and Ceram. The storm then drives the ship northward and eastward, away from the coast of Siberia ("Great Tartary") into the northeast Pacific, at that time unexplored. Brobdingnag lies somewhere in the vicinity of Alaska.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This paragraph is taken almost literally from Samuel Sturmy's *Mariner's Magazine* (1669). Swift is ridiculing the use of technical terms by writers of popular voyages.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A small bay or cove, affording anchorage.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Swift's intention, not always carried out accurately, is that everything in Brobdingnag should be, in relation to our familiar world, on a scale of ten to one.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Here, barley.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Flap or fold.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Farm servants.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Weak cider.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Revealing.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A short, broad sword.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Scientist, in contrast to the “vulgar” (commonplace, uncultivated).[Return to reference 1](#)

CHAPTER 2. *A description of the farmer's daughter. The Author carried to a market town, and then to the metropolis. The particulars of his journey.*

My mistress had a daughter of nine years old, a child of towardly parts for her age, very dexterous at her needle, and skillful in dressing her baby.<sup>2</sup> Her mother and she contrived to fit up the baby's cradle for me against night: the cradle was put into a small drawer of a cabinet, and the drawer placed upon a hanging shelf for fear of the rats. This was my bed all the time I stayed with those people, although made more convenient by degrees as I began to learn their language, and make my wants known. This young girl was so handy, that after I had once or twice pulled off my clothes before her, she was able to dress and undress me, although I never gave her that trouble when she would let me do either myself. She made me seven shirts, and some other linen of as fine cloth as could be got, which indeed was coarser than sackcloth, and these she constantly washed for me with her own hands. She was likewise my schoolmistress to teach me the language: when I pointed to anything, she told me the name of it in her own tongue, so that in a few days I was able to call for whatever I had a mind to. She was very good-natured, and not above forty foot high, being little for her age. She gave me the name of *Grildrig*, which the family took up, and afterwards the whole kingdom. The word imports what the Latins call *nanunculus*, the Italian *homunceletino*, and the English *mannikin*.<sup>3</sup> To her I chiefly owe my preservation in that country: we never parted while I was there; I called her my *Glumdalclitch*, or little nurse: and I should be guilty of great ingratitude if I omitted this honorable mention of her care and affection towards me, which I heartily wish it lay in my power to requite as she deserves, instead of being the innocent but unhappy instrument of her disgrace, as I have too much reason to fear.

It now began to be known and talked of in the neighborhood that my master had found a strange animal in the field, about the bigness of a *splacknuck*, but exactly shaped in every part like a

human creature, which it likewise imitated in all its actions: seemed to speak in a little language of its own, had already learned several words of theirs, went erect upon two legs, was tame and gentle, would come when it was called, do whatever it was bid, had the finest limbs in the world, and a complexion fairer than a nobleman's daughter of three years old. Another farmer who lived hard by, and was a particular friend of my master, came on a visit on purpose to inquire into the truth of this story. I was immediately produced, and placed upon a table, where I walked as I was commanded, drew my hanger, put it up again, made my reverence to my master's guest, asked him in his own language how he did, and told him he was welcome, just as my little nurse had instructed me. This man, who was old and dimsighted, put on his spectacles to behold me better, at which I could not forbear laughing very heartily, for his eyes appeared like the full moon shining into a chamber at two windows. Our people, who discovered the cause of my mirth, bore me company in laughing, at which the old fellow was fool enough to be angry and out of countenance. He had the character of a great miser, and to my misfortune he well deserved it by the cursed advice he gave my master to show me as a sight upon a market day in the next town, which was half an hour's riding, about two and twenty miles from our house. I guessed there was some mischief contriving when I observed my master and his friend whispering long together, sometimes pointing at me; and my fears made me fancy that I overheard and understood some of their words. But the next morning Glumdalclitch, my little nurse, told me the whole matter, which she had cunningly picked out from her mother. The poor girl laid me on her bosom, and fell a weeping with shame and grief. She apprehended some mischief would happen to me from rude vulgar folks, who might squeeze me to death, or break one of my limbs by taking me in their hands. She had also observed how modest I was in my nature, how nicely I regarded my honor, and what an indignity I should conceive it to be exposed for money as a public spectacle to the meanest of the people. She said her papa and mamma had promised that Grildrig should be hers; but now she found they meant to serve her as they did last year, when they pretended to

give her a lamb, and yet, as soon as it was fat, sold it to a butcher. For my own part, I may truly affirm that I was less concerned than my nurse. I had a strong hope, which never left me, that I should one day recover my liberty; and as to the ignominy of being carried about for a monster, I considered myself to be a perfect stranger in the country, and that such a misfortune could never be charged upon me as a reproach, if ever I should return to England; since the King of Great Britain himself, in my condition, must have undergone the same distress.

My master, pursuant to the advice of his friend, carried me in a box the next market day to the neighboring town, and took along with him his little daughter, my nurse, upon a pillion<sup>4</sup> behind him. The box was close on every side, with a little door for me to go in and out, and a few gimlet holes to let in air. The girl had been so careful to put the quilt of her baby's bed into it, for me to lie down on. However, I was terribly shaken and discomposed in this journey, although it were but of half an hour. For the horse went about forty foot at every step, and trotted so high that the agitation was equal to the rising and falling of a ship in a great storm, but much more frequent. Our journey was somewhat further than from London to St. Albans.<sup>5</sup> My master alighted at an inn which he used to frequent; and after consulting a while with the innkeeper, and making some necessary preparations, he hired the *Grultrud*, or crier, to give notice through the town of a strange creature to be seen at the Sign of the Green Eagle, not so big as a *splacknuck* (an animal in that country very finely shaped, about six foot long), and in every part of the body resembling an human creature; could speak several words and perform an hundred diverting tricks.

I was placed upon a table in the largest room of the inn, which might be near three hundred foot square. My little nurse stood on a low stool close to the table, to take care of me, and direct what I should do. My master, to avoid a crowd, would suffer only thirty people at a time to see me. I walked about on the table as the girl commanded; she asked me questions as far as she knew my understanding of the language reached, and I answered them as

loud as I could. I turned about several times to the company, paid my humble respects, said they were welcome, and used some other speeches I had been taught. I took up a thimble filled with liquor, which Glumdalclitch had given me for a cup, and drank their health. I drew out my hanger, and flourished with it after the manner of fencers in England. My nurse gave me part of a straw, which I exercised as pike, having learned the art in my youth. I was that day shown to twelve sets of company, and as often forced to go over again with the same fopperies, till I was half dead with weariness and vexation. For those who had seen me made such wonderful reports that the people were ready to break down the doors to come in. My master for his own interest would not suffer anyone to touch me except my nurse; and, to prevent danger, benches were set round the table at such a distance as put me out of everybody's reach. However, an unlucky schoolboy aimed a hazelnut directly at my head, which very narrowly missed me; otherwise, it came with so much violence that it would have infallibly knocked out my brains, for it was almost as large as a small pumpkin:<sup>6</sup> but I had the satisfaction to see the young rogue well beaten, and turned out of the room.

My master gave public notice that he would show me again the next market day, and in the meantime he prepared a more convenient vehicle for me, which he had reason enough to do; for I was so tired with my first journey, and with entertaining company for eight hours together, that I could hardly stand upon my legs or speak a word. It was at least three days before I recovered my strength; and that I might have no rest at home, all the neighboring gentlemen from an hundred miles round, hearing of my fame, came to see me at my master's own house. There could not be fewer than thirty persons with their wives and children (for the country is very populous); and my master demanded the rate of a full room whenever he showed me at home, although it were only to a single family. So that for some time I had but little ease every day of the week (except Wednesday, which is their Sabbath) although I were not carried to the town.

My master finding how profitable I was like to be, resolved to carry me to the most considerable cities of the kingdom. Having therefore provided himself with all things necessary for a long journey, and settled his affairs at home, he took leave of his wife; and upon the 17th of August, 1703, about two months after my arrival, we set out for the metropolis, situated near the middle of that empire, and about three thousand miles distance from our house. My master made his daughter Glumdalclitch ride behind him. She carried me on her lap in a box tied about her waist. The girl had lined it on all sides with the softest cloth she could get, well quilted underneath, furnished it with her baby's bed, provided me with linen and other necessaries, and made everything as convenient as she could. We had no other company but a boy of the house, who rode after us with the luggage.

My master's design was to show me in all the towns by the way, and to step out of the road for fifty or an hundred miles to any village or person of quality's house where he might expect custom. We made easy journeys of not above seven or eight score miles a day: for Glumdalclitch, on purpose to spare me, complained she was tired with the trotting of the horse. She often took me out of my box at my own desire, to give me air and show me the country, but always held me fast by leading strings.<sup>7</sup> We passed over five or six rivers many degrees broader and deeper than the Nile or the Ganges; and there was hardly a rivulet so small as the Thames at London Bridge. We were ten weeks in our journey, and I was shown in eighteen large towns, besides many large villages and private families.

On the 26th day of October, we arrived at the metropolis, called in their language *Lorbrulgrud*, or Pride of the Universe. My master took a lodging in the principal street of the city, not far from the royal palace, and put out bills in the usual form, containing an exact description of my person and parts. He hired a large room between three and four hundred foot wide. He provided a table sixty foot in diameter, upon which I was to act my part, and palisadoed it round three foot from the edge, and as many high, to prevent my falling



over. I was shown ten times a day to the wonder and satisfaction of all people. I could now speak the language tolerably well, and perfectly understood every word that was spoken to me. Besides, I had learned their alphabet, and could make a shift to explain a sentence here and there; for Glumdalclitch had been my instructor while we were at home, and at leisure hours during our journey. She carried a little book in her pocket, not much larger than a Sanson's *Atlas*;<sup>8</sup> it was a common treatise for the use of young girls, giving a short account of their religion: out of this she taught me my letters, and interpreted the words.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Doll. "Towardly parts": promising abilities.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Little man, dwarf. The Latin and Italian words are Swift's own coinages, as, of course, are the various words from the Brobdingnagian language.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A pad attached to the hinder part of a saddle, on which a second person, usually a woman, could ride.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: About twenty miles.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pumpkin.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Used to guide children learning to walk.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, over two feet long and about two feet wide.[Return to reference 8](#)

CHAPTER 3. *The Author sent for to Court. The Queen buys him of his master, the farmer, and presents him to the King. He disputes with his Majesty's great scholars. An apartment at Court provided for the Author. He is in high favor with the Queen. He stands up for the honor of his own country. His quarrels with the Queen's dwarf.*

The frequent labors I underwent every day made in a few weeks a very considerable change in my health: the more my master got by me, the more unsatiable he grew. I had quite lost my stomach, and was almost reduced to a skeleton. The farmer observed it, and concluding I soon must die, resolved to make as good a hand of me as he could. While he was thus reasoning and resolving with himself, a *Slardral*, or Gentleman Usher, came from Court, commanding my master to carry me immediately thither for the diversion of the Queen and her ladies. Some of the latter had already been to see me and reported strange things of my beauty, behavior, and good sense. Her Majesty and those who attended her were beyond measure delighted with my demeanor. I fell on my knees and begged the honor of kissing her Imperial foot; but this gracious princess held out her little finger towards me (after I was set on a table), which I embraced in both my arms, and put the tip of it, with the utmost respect, to my lip. She made me some general questions about my country and my travels, which I answered as distinctly and in as few words as I could. She asked whether I would be content to live at Court. I bowed down to the board of the table, and humbly answered that I was my master's slave, but if I were at my own disposal, I should be proud to devote my life to her Majesty's service. She then asked my master whether he were willing to sell me at a good price. He, who apprehended I could not live a month, was ready enough to part with me, and demanded a thousand pieces of gold, which were ordered him on the spot, each piece being about the bigness of eight hundred moidores;<sup>9</sup> but, allowing for the proportion of all things between that country and Europe, and the high price of gold among them, was hardly so great a sum as a thousand guineas would be in England. I then said to the

Queen, since I was now her Majesty's most humble creature and vassal, I must beg the favor that Glumdalclitch, who had always tended me with so much care and kindness, and understood to do it so well, might be admitted into her service, and continue to be my nurse and instructor. Her Majesty agreed to my petition, and easily got the farmer's consent, who was glad enough to have his daughter preferred at Court; and the poor girl herself was not able to hide her joy. My late master withdrew, bidding me farewell, and saying he had left me in a good service; to which I replied not a word, only making him a slight bow.

The Queen observed my coldness, and when the farmer was gone out of the apartment, asked me the reason. I made bold to tell her Majesty that I owed no other obligation to my late master than his not dashing out the brains of a poor harmless creature found by chance in his field; which obligation was amply recompensed by the gain he had made in showing me through half the kingdom, and the price he had now sold me for. That the life I had since led was laborious enough to kill an animal of ten times my strength. That my health was much impaired by the continual drudgery of entertaining the rabble every hour of the day; and that if my master had not thought my life in danger, her Majesty perhaps would not have got so cheap a bargain. But as I was out of all fear of being ill treated under the protection of so great and good an Empress, the Ornament of Nature, the Darling of the World, the Delight of her Subjects, the Phoenix of the Creation; so I hoped my late master's apprehensions would appear to be groundless, for I already found my spirits to revive by the influence of her most august presence.

This was the sum of my speech, delivered with great improprieties and hesitation; the latter part was altogether framed in the style peculiar to that people, whereof I learned some phrases from Glumdalclitch, while she was carrying me to Court.

The Queen, giving great allowance for my defectiveness in speaking, was however surprised at so much wit and good sense in so diminutive an animal. She took me in her own hand, and carried me to the King, who was then retired to his cabinet.<sup>1</sup> His Majesty, a

prince of much gravity, and austere countenance, not well observing my shape at first view, asked the Queen after a cold manner how long it was since she grew fond of a *splacknuck*; for such it seems he took me to be, as I lay upon my breast in her Majesty's right hand. But this princess, who hath an infinite deal of wit and humor, set me gently on my feet upon the scrutore,<sup>2</sup> and commanded me to give his Majesty an account of myself, which I did in a very few words; and Glumdalclitch, who attended at the cabinet door, and could not endure I should be out of her sight, being admitted, confirmed all that had passed from my arrival at her father's house.

The King, although he be as learned a person as any in his dominions, had been educated in the study of philosophy and particularly mathematics; yet when he observed my shape exactly, and saw me walk erect, before I began to speak, conceived I might be a piece of clockwork (which is in that country arrived to a very great perfection) contrived by some ingenious artist. But when he heard my voice, and found what I delivered to be regular and rational, he could not conceal his astonishment. He was by no means satisfied with the relation I gave him of the manner I came into his kingdom, but thought it a story concerted between Glumdalclitch and her father, who had taught me a set of words to make me sell at a higher price. Upon this imagination he put several other questions to me, and still received rational answers, no otherwise defective than by a foreign accent, and an imperfect knowledge in the language, with some rustic phrases which I had learned at the farmer's house, and did not suit the polite style of a court.

His Majesty sent for three great scholars who were then in their weekly waiting (according to the custom in that country). These gentlemen, after they had a while examined my shape with much nicety, were of different opinions concerning me. They all agreed that I could not be produced according to the regular laws of nature, because I was not framed with a capacity of preserving my life, either by swiftness, or climbing of trees, or digging holes in the earth. They observed by my teeth, which they viewed with great

exactness, that I was a carnivorous animal; yet most quadrupeds being an overmatch for me, and field mice, with some others, too nimble, they could not imagine how I should be able to support myself, unless I fed upon snails and other insects; which they offered, by many learned arguments, to evince that I could not possibly do. One of them seemed to think that I might be an embryo, or abortive birth. But this opinion was rejected by the other two, who observed my limbs to be perfect and finished, and that I had lived several years, as it was manifested from my beard, the stumps whereof they plainly discovered through a magnifying glass. They would not allow me to be a dwarf, because my littleness was beyond all degrees of comparison; for the Queen's favorite dwarf, the smallest ever known in that kingdom, was nearly thirty foot high. After much debate, they concluded unanimously that I was only *relplum scalcath*, which is interpreted literally, *lusus naturae*; a determination exactly agreeable to the modern philosophy of Europe, whose professors, disdaining the old evasion of *occult causes*, whereby the followers of Aristotle endeavor in vain to disguise their ignorance, have invented this wonderful solution of all difficulties, to the unspeakable advancement of human knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

After this decisive conclusion, I entreated to be heard a word or two. I applied myself to the King, and assured his Majesty that I came from a country which abounded with several millions of both sexes, and of my own stature, where the animals, trees, and houses were all in proportion, and where by consequence I might be as able to defend myself, and to find sustenance, as any of his Majesty's subjects could do here; which I took for a full answer to those gentlemen's arguments. To this they only replied with a smile of contempt, saying that the farmer had instructed me very well in my lesson. The King, who had a much better understanding, dismissing his learned men, sent for the farmer, who by good fortune was not yet gone out of town; having therefore first examined him privately, and then confronted him with me and the young girl, his Majesty began to think that what we told him might possibly be true. He desired the Queen to order that a particular care should be taken of

me, and was of opinion that Glumdalclitch should still continue in her office of tending me, because he observed we had a great affection for each other. A convenient apartment was provided for her at Court; she had a sort of governess appointed to take care of her education, a maid to dress her, and two other servants for menial offices; but the care of me was wholly appropriated to herself. The Queen commanded her own cabinetmaker to contrive a box that might serve me for a bedchamber, after the model that Glumdalclitch and I should agree upon. This man was a most ingenious artist, and according to my directions, in three weeks finished for me a wooden chamber of sixteen foot square and twelve high, with sash windows, a door, and two closets, like a London bedchamber. The board that made the ceiling was to be lifted up and down by two hinges, to put in a bed ready furnished by her Majesty's upholsterer, which Glumdalclitch took out every day to air, made it with her own hands, and letting it down at night, locked up the roof over me. A nice<sup>4</sup> workman, who was famous for little curiosities, undertook to make me two chairs, with backs and frames, of a substance not unlike ivory, and two tables, with a cabinet to put my things in. The room was quilted on all sides, as well as the floor and the ceiling, to prevent any accident from the carelessness of those who carried me, and to break the force of a jolt when I went in a coach. I desired a lock for my door to prevent rats and mice from coming in: the smith, after several attempts, made the smallest that ever was seen among them, for I have known a larger at the gate of a gentleman's house in England. I made a shift<sup>5</sup> to keep the key in a pocket of my own, fearing Glumdalclitch might lose it. The Queen likewise ordered the thinnest silks that could be gotten, to make me clothes, not much thicker than an English blanket, very cumbersome till I was accustomed to them. They were after the fashion of the kingdom, partly resembling the Persian, and partly the Chinese, and are a very grave, decent habit.

The Queen became so fond of my company that she could not dine without me. I had a table placed upon the same at which her Majesty ate, just at her left elbow, and a chair to sit on.

Glumdalclitch stood upon a stool on the floor, near my table, to assist and take care of me. I had an entire set of silver dishes and plates, and other necessaries, which, in proportion to those of the Queen, were not much bigger than what I have seen of the same kind in a London toyshop,<sup>6</sup> for the furniture of a baby-house: these my little nurse kept in her pocket in a silver box and gave me at meals as I wanted them, always cleaning them herself. No person dined with the Queen but the two Princesses Royal, the elder sixteen years old, and the younger at that time thirteen and a month. Her Majesty used to put a bit of meat upon one of my dishes, out of which I carved for myself; and her diversion was to see me eat in miniature. For the Queen (who had indeed but a weak stomach) took up at one mouthful as much as a dozen English farmers could eat at a meal, which to me was for some time a very nauseous sight. She would craunch the wing of a lark, bones and all, between her teeth, although it were nine times as large as that of a full-grown turkey; and put a bit of bread into her mouth as big as two twelve-penny loaves. She drank out of a golden cup, above a hogshead at a draught. Her knives were twice as long as a scythe set straight upon the handle. The spoons, forks, and other instruments were all in the same proportion. I remember when Glumdalclitch carried me out of curiosity to see some of the tables at Court, where ten or a dozen of these enormous knives and forks were lifted up together, I thought I had never till then beheld so terrible a sight.

It is the custom that every Wednesday (which, as I have before observed, was their Sabbath) the King and Queen, with the royal issue of both sexes, dine together in the apartment of his Majesty, to whom I was now become a favorite; and at these times my little chair and table were placed at his left hand, before one of the salt-cellars. This prince took a pleasure in conversing with me, inquiring into the manners, religion, laws, government, and learning of Europe; wherein I gave him the best account I was able. His apprehension was so clear, and his judgment so exact, that he made very wise reflections and observations upon all I said. But I confess



that after I had been a little too copious in talking of my own beloved country, of our trade and wars by sea and land, of our schisms in religion and parties in the state, the prejudices of his education prevailed so far that he could not forbear taking me up in his right hand, and stroking me gently with the other, after an hearty fit of laughing, asked me whether I were a Whig or a Tory. Then turning to his first minister, who waited behind him with a white staff, near as tall as the mainmast of the *Royal Sovereign*,<sup>7</sup> he observed how contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such diminutive insects as I: "and yet," said he, "I dare engage, these creatures have their titles and distinctions of honor; they contrive little nests and burrows, that they call houses and cities; they make a figure in dress and equipage; they love, they fight, they dispute, they cheat, they betray." And thus he continued on, while my color came and went several times with indignation to hear our noble country, the mistress of arts and arms, the scourge of France, the arbitress of Europe, the seat of virtue, piety, honor, and truth, the pride and envy of the world, so contemptuously treated.

But as I was not in a condition to resent injuries, so, upon mature thoughts, I began to doubt whether I were injured or no. For, after having been accustomed several months to the sight and converse of this people, and observed every object upon which I cast my eyes to be of proportionable magnitude, the horror I had first conceived from their bulk and aspect was so far worn off that if I had then beheld a company of English lords and ladies in their finery and birthday clothes,<sup>8</sup> acting their several parts in the most courtly manner of strutting and bowing and prating, to say the truth, I should have been strongly tempted to laugh as much at them as this King and his grandees did at me. Neither indeed could I forbear smiling at myself when the Queen used to place me upon her hand towards a looking glass, by which both our persons appeared before me in full view together; and there could be nothing more ridiculous than the comparison; so that I really began to imagine myself dwindled many degrees below my usual size.



Nothing angered and mortified me so much as the Queen's dwarf, who being of the lowest stature that was ever in that country (for I verily think he was not full thirty foot high) became so insolent at seeing a creature so much beneath him that he would always affect to swagger and look big as he passed by me in the Queen's antechamber, while I was standing on some table talking with the lords or ladies of the court; and he seldom failed of a smart word or two upon my littleness, against which I could only revenge myself by calling him brother, challenging him to wrestle, and such repartees as are usual in the mouths of Court pages. One day at dinner this malicious little cub was so nettled with something I had said to him that, raising himself upon the frame of Her Majesty's chair, he took me up by the middle, as I was sitting down, not thinking any harm, and let me drop into a large silver bowl of cream, and then ran away as fast as he could. I fell over head and ears, and if I had not been a good swimmer, it might have gone very hard with me; for Glumdalclitch in that instant happened to be at the other end of the room, and the Queen was in such a fright that she wanted presence of mind to assist me. But my little nurse ran to my relief, and took me out, after I had swallowed above a quart of cream. I was put to bed; however, I received no other damage than the loss of a suit of clothes, which was utterly spoiled. The dwarf was soundly whipped, and as further punishment, forced to drink up the bowl of cream into which he had thrown me; neither was he ever restored to favor: for soon after the Queen bestowed him to a lady of high quality, so that I saw him no more, to my very great satisfaction; for I could not tell to what extremity such a malicious urchin might have carried his resentment.

He had before served me a scurvy trick, which set the Queen a laughing, although at the same time she were heartily vexed, and would have immediately cashiered him, if I had not been so generous as to intercede. Her Majesty had taken a marrow bone upon her plate, and after knocking out the marrow, placed the bone again in the dish, erect as it stood before; the dwarf watching his opportunity, while Glumdalclitch was gone to the sideboard,

mounted upon the stool she stood on to take care of me at meals, took me up in both hands, and squeezing my legs together, wedged them into the marrow bone above my waist, where I stuck for some time, and made a very ridiculous figure. I believe it was near a minute before anyone knew what was become of me, for I thought it below me to cry out. But, as princes seldom get their meat hot, my legs were not scalded, only my stockings and breeches in a sad condition. The dwarf at my entreaty had no other punishment than a sound whipping.

I was frequently rallied by the Queen upon account of my fearfulness, and she used to ask me whether the people of my country were as great cowards as myself. The occasion was this. The kingdom is much pestered with flies in summer, and these odious insects, each of them as big as a Dunstable lark, hardly gave me any rest while I sat at dinner, with their continual humming and buzzing about my ears. They would sometimes alight upon my victuals, and leave their loathsome excrement or spawn behind, which to me was very visible, although not to the natives of that country, whose large optics were not so acute as mine in viewing smaller objects. Sometimes they would fix upon my nose or forehead, where they stung me to the quick, smelling very offensively; and I could easily trace that viscous matter, which our naturalists tell us enables those creatures to walk with their feet upwards upon a ceiling. I had much ado to defend myself against these detestable animals, and could not forbear starting when they came on my face. It was the common practice of the dwarf to catch a number of these insects in his hand, as schoolboys do among us, and let them out suddenly under my nose, on purpose to frighten me, and divert the Queen. My remedy was to cut them in pieces with my knife as they flew in the air, wherein my dexterity was much admired.

I remember one morning when Glumdalclitch had set me in my box upon a window, as she usually did in fair days to give me air (for I durst not venture to let the box be hung on a nail out of the window, as we do with cages in England), after I had lifted up one of my sashes, and sat down at my table to eat a piece of sweet cake

for my breakfast, above twenty wasps, allured by the smell, came flying into the room, humming louder than the drones of as many bagpipes. Some of them seized my cake, and carried it piecemeal away; others flew about my head and face, confounding me with the noise, and putting me in the utmost terror of their stings. However, I had the courage to rise and draw my hanger, and attack them in the air. I dispatched four of them, but the rest got away, and I presently shut my window. These insects were as large as partridges; I took out their stings, found them an inch and a half long, and as sharp as needles. I carefully preserved them all, and having since shown them with some other curiosities in several parts of Europe, upon my return to England I gave three of them to Gresham College,<sup>9</sup> and kept the fourth for myself.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Portuguese coins.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Private apartment.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Writing desk.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Swift had contempt for both the medieval Schoolmen, who discussed “occult causes,” the unknown causes of observable effects, and modern natural philosophers, who, he believed, often concealed their ignorance by using equally meaningless terms. “*Lusus naturae*”: one of nature’s sports, or, roughly, freaks.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Exact.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Contrived.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A shop for selling knickknacks.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: One of the largest ships in the Royal Navy. “White staff”: at the English court borne by the lord treasurer as the symbol of his office.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Courtiers dressed with special splendor on the monarch’s birthday.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Royal Society, in its earliest years, met in Gresham College.[Return to reference 9](#)

CHAPTER 4. *The country described. A proposal for correcting modern maps. The King's palace, and some account of the metropolis. The Author's way of traveling. The chief temple described.*

I now intend to give the reader a short description of this country, as far as I had traveled in it, which was not above two thousand miles round Lorbrulgrud the metropolis. For the Queen, whom I always attended, never went further when she accompanied the King in his progresses, and there stayed till his Majesty returned from viewing his frontiers. The whole extent of this prince's dominions reacheth about six thousand miles in length, and from three to five in breadth. From whence I cannot but conclude that our geographers of Europe are in a great error by supposing nothing but sea between Japan and California: for it was ever my opinion that there must be a balance of earth to counterpoise the great continent of Tartary; and therefore they ought to correct their maps and charts by joining this vast tract of land to the northwest parts of America, wherein I shall be ready to lend them my assistance.

The kingdom is a peninsula, terminated to the northeast by a ridge of mountains thirty miles high, which are altogether impassable by reason of the volcanoes upon the tops. Neither do the most learned know what sort of mortals inhabit beyond those mountains, or whether they be inhabited at all. On the three other sides it is bounded by the ocean. There is not one seaport in the whole kingdom; and those parts of the coasts into which the rivers issue are so full of pointed rocks, and the sea generally so rough, that there is no venturing with the smallest of their boats; so that these people are wholly excluded from any commerce with the rest of the world. But the large rivers are full of vessels, and abound with excellent fish, for they seldom get any from the sea, because the sea fish are of the same size with those in Europe, and consequently not worth catching; whereby it is manifest that nature, in the production of plants and animals of so extraordinary a bulk, is wholly confined to this continent, of which I leave the reasons to be determined by philosophers. However, now and then they take a whale that happens to be dashed against the rocks, which the common people

feed on heartily. These whales I have known so large that a man could hardly carry one upon his shoulders; and sometimes for curiosity they are brought in hampers to Lorbrulgrud: I saw one of them in a dish at the King's table, which passed for a rarity, but I did not observe he was fond of it; for I think indeed the bigness disgusted him, although I have seen one somewhat larger in Greenland.

The country is well inhabited, for it contains fifty-one cities, near an hundred walled towns, and a great number of villages. To satisfy my curious reader, it may be sufficient to describe Lorbrulgrud. This city stands upon almost two equal parts on each side the river that passes through. It contains above eight thousand houses, and about six hundred thousand inhabitants. It is in length three *glonglungs* (which make about fifty-four English miles) and two and a half in breadth, as I measured it myself in the royal map made by the King's order, which was laid on the ground on purpose for me, and extended an hundred feet; I paced the diameter and circumference several times barefoot, and computing by the scale, measured it pretty exactly.

The King's palace is no regular edifice, but an heap of buildings about seven miles round: the chief rooms are generally two hundred and forty foot high, and broad and long in proportion. A coach was allowed to Glumdalclitch and me, wherein her governess frequently took her out to see the town, go among the shops; and I was always of the party, carried in my box, although the girl at my own desire would often take me out, and hold me in her hand, that I might more conveniently view the houses and the people as we passed along the streets. I reckoned our coach to be about a square of Westminster Hall,<sup>1</sup> but not altogether so high; however, I cannot be very exact. One day the governess ordered our coachman to stop at several shops, where the beggars, watching their opportunity, crowded to the sides of the coach, and gave me the most horrible spectacles that ever an English eye beheld. There was a woman with a cancer in her breast, swelled to a monstrous size, full of holes, in two or three of which I could have easily crept, and covered my

whole body. There was a fellow with a wen in his neck, larger than five woolpacks, and another with a couple of wooden legs, each about twenty foot high. But the most hateful sight of all was the lice crawling on their clothes. I could see distinctly the limbs of these vermin with my naked eye, much better than those of an European louse through a microscope, and their snouts with which they rooted like swine. They were the first I had ever beheld; and I should have been curious enough to dissect one of them if I had proper instruments (which I unluckily left behind me in the ship), although indeed the sight was so nauseous that it perfectly turned my stomach.

Besides the large box in which I was usually carried, the Queen ordered a smaller one to be made for me, of about twelve foot square and ten high, for the convenience of traveling, because the other was somewhat too large for Glumdalclitch's lap, and cumbersome in the coach; it was made by the same artist, whom I directed in the whole contrivance. This traveling closet was an exact square with a window in the middle of three of the squares, and each window was latticed with iron wire on the outside, to prevent accidents in long journeys. On the fourth side, which had no windows, two strong staples were fixed, through which the person that carried me, when I had a mind to be on horseback, put in a leathern belt, and buckled it about his waist. This was always the office of some grave trusty servant in whom I could confide, whether I attended the King and Queen in their progresses, or were disposed to see the gardens, or pay a visit to some great lady or minister of state in the court, when Glumdalclitch happened to be out of order: for I soon began to be known and esteemed among the greatest officers, I suppose more upon account of their Majesties' favor than any merit of my own. In journeys, when I was weary of the coach, a servant on horseback would buckle my box, and place it on a cushion before him; and there I had a full prospect of the country on three sides from my three windows. I had in this closet a field bed<sup>2</sup> and a hammock hung from the ceiling, two chairs and a table, neatly screwed to the floor to prevent being tossed about by the agitation

of the horse or the coach. And having been long used to sea voyages, those motions, although sometimes very violent, did not much discompose me.

When I had a mind to see the town, it was always in my traveling closet, which Glumdalclitch held in her lap in a kind of open sedan, after the fashion of the country, borne by four men, and attended by two others in the Queen's livery. The people, who had often heard of me, were very curious to crowd about the sedan; and the girl was complaisant enough to make the bearers stop, and to take me in her hand that I might be more conveniently seen.

I was very desirous to see the chief temple, and particularly the tower belonging to it, which is reckoned the highest in the kingdom. Accordingly one day my nurse carried me thither, but I may truly say I came back disappointed; for the height is not above three thousand foot, reckoning from the ground to the highest pinnacle top; which, allowing for the difference between the size of those people and us in Europe, is no great matter for admiration, nor at all equal in proportion (if I rightly remember) to Salisbury steeple.<sup>3</sup> But, not to detract from a nation to which during my life I shall acknowledge myself extremely obliged, it must be allowed that whatever this famous tower wants in height is amply made up in beauty and strength. For the walls are near an hundred foot thick, built of hewn stone, whereof each is about forty foot square, and adorned on all sides with statues of gods and emperors cut in marble larger than the life, placed in their several niches. I measured a little finger which had fallen down from one of these statues, and lay unperceived among some rubbish, and found it exactly four foot and an inch in length. Glumdalclitch wrapped it up in a handkerchief, and carried it home in her pocket to keep among other trinkets, of which the girl was very fond, as children at her age usually are.

The King's kitchen is indeed a noble building, vaulted at top, and about six hundred foot high. The great oven is not so wide by ten paces as the cupola at St. Paul's:<sup>4</sup> for I measured the latter on purpose after my return. But if I should describe the kitchen grate, the prodigious pots and kettles, the joints of meat turning on the

spits, with many other particulars, perhaps I should be hardly believed; at least a severe critic would be apt to think I enlarged a little, as travelers are often suspected to do. To avoid which censure, I fear I have run too much into the other extreme, and that if this treatise should happen to be translated into the language of Brobdingnag (which is the general name of that kingdom) and transmitted thither, the King and his people would have reason to complain that I had done them an injury by a false and diminutive representation.

His Majesty seldom keeps above six hundred horses in his stables: they are generally from fifty-four to sixty foot high. But when he goes abroad on solemn days, he is attended for state by a militia guard of five hundred horse, which indeed I thought was the most splendid sight that could be ever beheld, till I saw part of his army in battalia,<sup>5</sup> whereof I shall find another occasion to speak.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The ancient hall, now incorporated into the Houses of Parliament, where the law courts then sat. Swift presumably means the square of its breadth (just under sixty-eight feet).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Folding bed, cot.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: One of the most beautiful Gothic steeples in England is that of Salisbury Cathedral, 404 feet high.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The cupola of St. Paul's Cathedral in London is 108 feet in diameter.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Battle array.[Return to reference 5](#)



CHAPTER 5. *Several adventures that happened to the Author. The execution of a criminal. The Author shows his skill in navigation.*

I should have lived happy enough in that country if my littleness had not exposed me to several ridiculous and troublesome accidents, some of which I shall venture to relate. Glumdalclitch often carried me into the gardens of the court in my smaller box, and would sometimes take me out of it and hold me in her hand, or set me down to walk. I remember, before the dwarf left the Queen, he followed us one day into those gardens; and my nurse having set me down, he and I being close together near some dwarf apple trees, I must needs show my wit by a silly allusion between him and the trees, which happens to hold in their language as it doth in ours. Whereupon, the malicious rogue watching his opportunity, when I was walking under one of them, shook it directly over my head, by which a dozen apples, each of them near as large as a Bristol barrel, came tumbling about my ears; one of them hit me on the back as I chanced to stoop, and knocked me down flat on my face, but I received no other hurt; and the dwarf was pardoned at my desire, because I had given the provocation.

Another day Glumdalclitch left me on a smooth grassplot to divert myself while she walked at some distance with her governess. In the meantime there suddenly fell such a violent shower of hail that I was immediately by the force of it struck to the ground: and when I was down, the hailstones gave me such cruel bangs all over the body as if I had been pelted with tennis balls;<sup>6</sup> however I made a shift to creep on all four, and shelter myself by lying on my face on the lee side of a border of lemon thyme, but so bruised from head to foot that I could not go abroad in ten days. Neither is this at all to be wondered at, because nature in that country observing the same proportion through all her operations, a hailstone is near eighteen hundred times as large as one in Europe; which I can assert upon experience, having been so curious to weigh and measure them.

But a more dangerous accident happened to me in the same garden when my little nurse, believing she had put me in a secure

place, which I often entreated her to do that I might enjoy my own thoughts, and having left my box at home to avoid the trouble of carrying it, went to another part of the garden with her governess and some ladies of her acquaintance. While she was absent and out of hearing, a small white spaniel belonging to one of the chief gardeners, having got by accident into the garden, happened to range near the place where I lay. The dog following the scent, came directly up, and taking me in his mouth, ran straight to his master, wagging his tail, and set me gently on the ground. By good fortune he had been so well taught that I was carried between his teeth without the least hurt, or even tearing my clothes. But the poor gardener, who knew me well, and had a great kindness for me, was in a terrible fright. He gently took me up in both his hands, and asked me how I did; but I was so amazed and out of breath that I could not speak a word. In a few minutes I came to myself, and he carried me safe to my little nurse, who by this time had returned to the place where she left me, and was in cruel agonies when I did not appear nor answer when she called; she severely reprimanded the gardener on account of his dog. But the thing was hushed up and never known at court; for the girl was afraid of the Queen's anger; and truly, as to myself, I thought it would not be for my reputation that such a story should go about.

This accident absolutely determined Glumdalclitch never to trust me abroad for the future out of her sight. I had been long afraid of this resolution, and therefore concealed from her some little unlucky adventures that happened in those times when I was left by myself. Once a kite hovering over the garden made a stoop<sup>2</sup> at me, and if I had not resolutely drawn my hanger, and run under a thick espalier, he would have certainly carried me away in his talons. Another time walking to the top of a fresh molehill, I fell to my neck in the hole through which that animal had cast up the earth, and coined some lie, not worth remembering, to excuse myself for spoiling my clothes. I likewise broke my right shin against the shell of a snail, which I happened to stumble over, as I was walking alone, and thinking on poor England.

I cannot tell whether I were more pleased or mortified to observe in those solitary walks that the smaller birds did not appear to be at all afraid of me; but would hop about within a yard distance, looking for worms and other food with as much indifference and security as if no creature at all were near them. I remember a thrush had the confidence to snatch out of my hand with his bill a piece of cake that Glumdalclitch had just given me for my breakfast. When I attempted to catch any of these birds, they would boldly turn against me, endeavoring to pick my fingers, which I durst not venture within their reach; and then they would hop back unconcerned to hunt for worms or snails, as they did before. But one day I took a thick cudgel, and threw it with all my strength so luckily at a linnet that I knocked him down, and seizing him by the neck with both my hands, ran with him in triumph to my nurse. However, the bird, who had only been stunned, recovering himself, gave me so many boxes with his wings on both sides of my head and body, though I held him at arm's length, and was out of the reach of his claws, that I was twenty times thinking to let him go. But I was soon relieved by one of our servants, who wrung off the bird's neck, and I had him next day for dinner, by the Queen's command. This linnet, as near as I can remember, seemed to be somewhat larger than an English swan.

The Maids of Honor often invited Glumdalclitch to their apartments, and desired she would bring me along with her, on purpose to have the pleasure of seeing and touching me. They would often strip me naked from top to toe and lay me at full length in their bosoms; wherewith I was much disgusted, because, to say the truth, a very offensive smell came from their skins, which I do not mention or intend to the disadvantage of those excellent ladies, for whom I have all manner of respect; but I conceive that my sense was more acute in proportion to my littleness, and that those illustrious persons were no more disagreeable to their lovers, or to each other, than people of the same quality are with us in England. And, after all, I found their natural smell was much more supportable than when they used perfumes, under which I

immediately swooned away. I cannot forget that an intimate friend of mine in Lilliput took the freedom in a warm day, when I had used a good deal of exercise, to complain of a strong smell about me, although I am as little faulty that way as most of my sex: but I suppose his faculty of smelling was as nice with regard to me as mine was to that of this people. Upon this point, I cannot forbear doing justice to the Queen, my mistress, and Glumdalclitch, my nurse, whose persons were as sweet as those of any lady in England.

That which gave me most uneasiness among these Maids of Honor, when my nurse carried me to visit them, was to see them use me without any manner of ceremony, like a creature who had no sort of consequence. For they would strip themselves to the skin and put on their smocks in my presence, while I was placed on their toilet<sup>8</sup> directly before their naked bodies; which, I am sure, to me was very far from being a tempting sight, or from giving me any other emotions than those of horror and disgust. Their skins appeared so coarse and uneven, so variously colored, when I saw them near, with a mole here and there as broad as a trencher, and hairs hanging from it thicker than packthreads, to say nothing further concerning the rest of their persons. Neither did they at all scruple, while I was by, to discharge what they had drunk, to the quantity of at least two hogsheads, in a vessel that held above three tuns. The handsomest among these Maids of Honor, a pleasant frolicsome girl of sixteen, would sometimes set me astride upon one of her nipples, with many other tricks, wherein the reader will excuse me for not being over particular. But I was so much displeased that I entreated Glumdalclitch to contrive some excuse for not seeing that young lady any more.

One day a young gentleman, who was nephew to my nurse's governess, came and pressed them both to see an execution. It was of a man who had murdered one of that gentleman's intimate acquaintance. Glumdalclitch was prevailed on to be of the company, very much against her inclination, for she was naturally tender-hearted: and as for myself, although I abhorred such kind of

spectacles, yet my curiosity tempted me to see something that I thought must be extraordinary. The malefactor was fixed in a chair upon a scaffold erected for the purpose, and his head cut off at a blow with a sword of about forty foot long. The veins and arteries spouted up such a prodigious quantity of blood, and so high in the air, that the great *jet d'eau* at Versailles was not equal for the time it lasted; and the head, when it fell on the scaffold floor, gave such a bounce,<sup>9</sup> as made me start, although I were at least half an English mile distant.

The Queen, who often used to hear me talk of my sea voyages, and took all occasions to divert me when I was melancholy, asked me whether I understood how to handle a sail or an oar, and whether a little exercise of rowing might not be convenient for my health. I answered that I understood both very well. For although my proper employment had been to be surgeon or doctor to the ship, yet often, upon a pinch, I was forced to work like a common mariner. But I could not see how this could be done in their country, where the smallest wherry was equal to a first-rate man-of-war among us, and such a boat as I could manage would never live in any of their rivers. Her Majesty said, if I would contrive a boat, her own joiner should make it, and she would provide a place for me to sail in. The fellow was an ingenious workman and, by my instructions, in ten days finished a pleasure boat with all its tackling, able conveniently to hold eight Europeans. When it was finished, the Queen was so delighted that she ran with it in her lap to the King, who ordered it to be put in a cistern full of water, with me in it, by way of trial; where I could not manage my two sculls, or little oars, for want of room. But the Queen had before contrived another project. She ordered the joiner to make a wooden trough of three hundred foot long, fifty broad, and eight deep; which being well pitched to prevent leaking, was placed on the floor along the wall in an outer room of the palace. It had a cock near the bottom to let out the water when it began to grow stale, and two servants could easily fill it in half an hour. Here I often used to row for my own diversion, as well as that of the Queen and her ladies, who thought themselves

well entertained with my skill and agility. Sometimes I would put up my sail, and then my business was only to steer, while the ladies gave me a gale with their fans; and when they were weary, some of the pages would blow my sail forward with their breath, while I showed my art by steering starboard or larboard as I pleased. When I had done, Glumdalclitch always carried my boat into her closet, and hung it on a nail to dry.

In this exercise I once met an accident which had like to have cost me my life. For one of the pages having put my boat into the trough, the governess who attended Glumdalclitch very officiously lifted me up to place me in the boat; but I happened to slip through her fingers, and should have infallibly fallen down forty foot upon the floor, if by the luckiest chance in the world I had not been stopped by a corking-pin that stuck in the good gentlewoman's stomacher;<sup>1</sup> the head of the pin passed between my shirt and the waistband of my breeches, and thus I was held by the middle in the air until Glumdalclitch ran to my relief.

Another time, one of the servants, whose office it was to fill my trough every third day with fresh water, was so careless to let a huge frog (not perceiving it) slip out of his pail. The frog lay concealed till I was put into my boat, but then seeing a resting place, climbed up, and made it lean so much on one side that I was forced to balance it with all my weight on the other, to prevent overturning. When the frog was got in, it hopped at once half the length of the boat, and then over my head, backwards and forwards, daubing my face and clothes with its odious slime. The largeness of its features made it appear the most deformed animal that can be conceived. However, I desired Glumdalclitch to let me deal with it alone. I banged it a good while with one of my sculls, and at last forced it to leap out of the boat.

But the greatest danger I ever underwent in that kingdom was from a monkey, who belonged to one of the clerks of the kitchen. Glumdalclitch had locked me up in her closet, while she went somewhere upon business or a visit. The weather being very warm, the closet window was left open, as well as the windows in the door

of my bigger box, in which I usually lived, because of its largeness and conveniency. As I sat quietly meditating at my table, I heard something bounce in at the closet window, and skip about from one side to the other, whereat, although I was much alarmed, yet I ventured to look out, but stirred not from my seat; and then I saw this frolicsome animal, frisking and leaping up and down, till at last he came to my box, which he seemed to view with great pleasure and curiosity, peeping in at the door and every window. I retreated to the farther corner of my room, or box, but the monkey looking in at every side, put me into such a fright that I wanted presence of mind to conceal myself under the bed, as I might easily have done. After some time spent in peeping, grinning, and chattering, he at last espied me, and reaching one of his paws in at the door, as a cat does when she plays with a mouse, although I often shifted place to avoid him, he at length seized the lappet of my coat (which, being made of that country cloth, was very thick and strong) and dragged me out. He took me up in his right forefoot, and held me as a nurse does a child she is going to suckle, just as I have seen the same sort of creature do with a kitten in Europe: and when I offered to struggle, he squeezed me so hard that I thought it more prudent to submit. I have good reason to believe that he took me for a young one of his own species, by his often stroking my face very gently with his other paw. In these diversions he was interrupted by a noise at the closet door, as if somebody were opening it, whereupon he suddenly leaped up to the window at which he had come in, and thence upon the leads and gutters, walking upon three legs, and holding me in the fourth, till he clambered up to a roof that was next to ours. I heard Glumdalclitch give a shriek at the moment he was carrying me out. The poor girl was almost distracted: that quarter of the palace was all in an uproar; the servants ran for ladders; the monkey was seen by hundreds in the court, sitting upon the ridge of a building, holding me like a baby in one of his forepaws and feeding me with the other, by cramming into my mouth some victuals he had squeezed out of the bag on one side of his chaps, and patting me when I would not eat; whereat many of the rabble below could not forebear laughing; neither do I think they justly ought to be blamed,

for without question the sight was ridiculous enough to everybody but myself. Some of the people threw up stones, hoping to drive the monkey down; but this was strictly forbidden, or else very probably my brains had been dashed out.

The ladders were now applied, and mounted by several men; which the monkey observing, and finding himself almost encompassed, not being able to make speed enough with his three legs, let me drop on a ridge tile, and made his escape. Here I sat for some time three hundred yards from the ground, expecting every moment to be blown down by the wind, or to fall by my own giddiness, and come tumbling over and over from the ridge to the eaves. But an honest lad, one of my nurse's footmen, climbed up, and putting me into his breeches pocket, brought me down safe.

I was almost choked with the filthy stuff the monkey had crammed down my throat; but my dear little nurse picked it out of my mouth with a small needle, and then I fell a vomiting, which gave me great relief. Yet I was so weak and bruised in the sides with the squeezes given me by this odious animal that I was forced to keep my bed a fortnight. The King, Queen, and all the Court sent every day to inquire after my health, and her Majesty made me several visits during my sickness. The monkey was killed, and an order made that no such animal should be kept about the palace.

When I attended the King after my recovery, to return him thanks for his favors, he was pleased to rally me a good deal upon this adventure. He asked me what my thoughts and speculations were while I lay in the monkey's paw, how I liked the victuals he gave me, his manner of feeding, and whether the fresh air on the roof had sharpened my stomach. He desired to know what I would have done upon such an occasion in my own country. I told his Majesty that in Europe we had no monkeys, except such as were brought for curiosities from other places, and so small that I could deal with a dozen of them together, if they presumed to attack me. And as for that monstrous animal with whom I was so lately engaged (it was indeed as large as an elephant), if my fears had suffered me to think so far as to make use of my hanger (looking



fiercely and clapping my hand upon the hilt as I spoke) when he poked his paw into my chamber, perhaps I should have given him such a wound as would have made him glad to withdraw it with more haste than he put it in. This I delivered in a firm tone, like a person who was jealous lest his courage should be called in question. However, my speech produced nothing else besides a loud laughter, which all the respect due to his Majesty from those about him could not make them contain. This made me reflect how vain an attempt it is for a man to endeavor doing himself honor among those who are out of all degree of equality or comparison with him. And yet I have seen the moral of my own behavior very frequent in England since my return, where a little contemptible varlet, without the least title to birth, person, wit, or common sense, shall presume to look with importance, and put himself upon a foot with the greatest persons of the kingdom.

I was every day furnishing the court with some ridiculous story; and Glumdalclitch, although she loved me to excess, yet was arch enough to inform the Queen whenever I committed any folly that she thought would be diverting to her Majesty. The girl, who had been out of order,<sup>2</sup> was carried by her governess to take the air about an hour's distance, or thirty miles from town. They alighted out of the coach near a small footpath in a field, and Glumdalclitch setting down my traveling box, I went out of it to walk. There was a cow dung in the patch, and I must needs try my activity by attempting to leap over it. I took a run, but unfortunately jumped short, and found myself just in the middle up to my knees. I waded through with some difficulty, and one of the footmen wiped me as clean as he could with his handkerchief; for I was filthily bemired, and my nurse confined me to my box till we returned home, where the Queen was soon informed of what had passed and the footmen spread it about the Court, so that all the mirth, for some days, was at my expense.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Eighteenth-century tennis balls, unlike the modern, were very hard.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Swoop. "Kite": a bird of prey.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Toilet table.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A sudden noise. "*Jet d'eau* at Versailles": this fountain rose over forty feet in the air.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An ornamental covering for the front and upper part of the body. "Officiously": kindly, dutifully. "Corking-pin": a pin of the largest size.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Not feeling well.[Return to reference 2](#)

CHAPTER 6. *Several contrivances of the Author to please the King and Queen. He shows his skill in music. The King inquires into the state of Europe, which the Author relates to him. The King's observations thereon.*

I used to attend the King's levee once or twice a week, and had often seen him under the barber's hand, which indeed was at first very terrible to behold. For the razor was almost twice as long as an ordinary scythe. His Majesty, according to the custom of the country, was only shaved twice a week. I once prevailed on the barber to give me some of the suds or lather, out of which I picked forty or fifty of the strongest stumps of hair. I then took a piece of fine wood, and cut it like the back of a comb, making several holes in it at equal distance with as small a needle as I could get from Glumdalclitch. I fixed in the stumps so artificially,<sup>3</sup> scraping and sloping them with my knife towards the points, that I made a very tolerable comb; which was a seasonable supply, my own being so much broken in the teeth that it was almost useless; neither did I know any artist in that country so nice and exact as would undertake to make me another.

And this puts me in mind of an amusement wherein I spent many of my leisure hours. I desired the Queen's woman to save for me the combings of her Majesty's hair, whereof in time I got a good quantity; and consulting with my friend the cabinetmaker, who had received general orders to do little jobs for me, I directed him to make two chair frames, no larger than those I had in my box, and then to bore little holes with a fine awl round those parts where I designed the backs and seats; through these holes I wove the strongest hairs I could pick out, just after the manner of cane chairs in England. When they were finished, I made a present of them to her Majesty, who kept them in her cabinet, and used to show them for curiosities, as indeed they were the wonder of every one that beheld them. The Queen would have made me sit upon one of these chairs, but I absolutely refused to obey her, protesting I would rather die a thousand deaths than place a dishonorable part of my

body on those precious hairs that once adorned her Majesty's head. Of these hairs (as I had always a mechanical genius) I likewise made a neat little purse above five foot long, with her Majesty's name deciphered in gold letters, which I gave to Glumdalclitch by the Queen's consent. To say the truth, it was more for show than use, being not of strength to bear the weight of the larger coins; and therefore she kept nothing in it but some little toys<sup>4</sup> that girls are fond of.

The King, who delighted in music, had frequent consorts<sup>5</sup> at court, to which I was sometimes carried, and set in my box on a table to hear them; but the noise was so great that I could hardly distinguish the tunes. I am confident that all the drums and trumpets of a royal army, beating and sounding together just at your ears, could not equal it. My practice was to have my box removed from the places where the performers sat, as far as I could, then to shut the doors and windows of it, and draw the window curtains, after which I found their music not disagreeable.

I had learned in my youth to play a little upon the spinet. Glumdalclitch kept one in her chamber, and a master attended twice a week to teach her: I call it a spinet, because it somewhat resembled that instrument, and was played upon in the same manner. A fancy came into my head that I would entertain the King and Queen with an English tune upon this instrument. But this appeared extremely difficult: for the spinet was near sixty foot long, each key being almost a foot wide; so that, with my arms extended, I could not reach to above five keys, and to press them down required a good smart stroke with my fist, which would be too great a labor and to no purpose. The method I contrived was this: I prepared two round sticks about the bigness of common cudgels; they were thicker at one end than the other, and I covered the thicker ends with a piece of a mouse's skin, that by rapping on them I might neither damage the tops of the keys, nor interrupt the sound. Before the spinet a bench was placed, about four foot below the keys, and I was put upon the bench. I ran sideling upon it that way and this, as fast as I could, banging the proper keys with my

two sticks; and made a shift to play a jig, to the great satisfaction of both their Majesties: but it was the most violent exercise I ever underwent, and yet I could not strike above sixteen keys, nor, consequently, play the bass and treble together, as other artists do; which was a great disadvantage to my performance.

The King, who, as I before observed, was a prince of excellent understanding, would frequently order that I should be brought in my box and set upon the table in his closet. He would then command me to bring one of my chairs out of the box, and sit down within three yards distance upon the top of the cabinet, which brought me almost to a level with his face. In this manner I had several conversations with him. I one day took the freedom to tell his Majesty that the contempt he discovered towards Europe, and the rest of the world, did not seem answerable to those excellent qualities of mind that he was master of. That reason did not extend itself with the bulk of the body: on the contrary, we observed in our country that the tallest persons were usually least provided with it. That among other animals, bees and ants had the reputation of more industry, art, and sagacity than many of the larger kinds; and that, as inconsiderable as he took me to be, I hoped I might live to do his Majesty some signal service. The King heard me with attention, and began to conceive a much better opinion of me than he had before. He desired I would give him as exact an account of the government of England as I possibly could; because, as fond as princes commonly are of their own customs (for so he conjectured of other monarchs, by my former discourses), he should be glad to hear of anything that might deserve imitation.

Imagine with thyself, courteous reader, how often I then wished for the tongue of Demosthenes or Cicero,<sup>6</sup> that might have enabled me to celebrate the praise of my own dear native country in a style equal to its merits and felicity.

I began my discourse by informing his Majesty that our dominions consisted of two islands, which composed three mighty kingdoms under one sovereign, beside our plantations in America. I dwelt long upon the fertility of our soil, and the temperature<sup>7</sup> of our

climate. I then spoke at large upon the constitution of an English Parliament, partly made up of an illustrious body called the House of Peers,<sup>8</sup> persons of the noblest blood, and of the most ancient and ample patrimonies. I described that extraordinary care always taken of their education in arts and arms, to qualify them for being counselors born to the king and kingdom; to have a share in the legislature, to be members of the highest Court of Judicature, from whence there could be no appeal; and to be champions always ready for the defense of their prince and country, by their valor, conduct, and fidelity. That these were the ornament and bulwark of the kingdom, worthy followers of their most renowned ancestors, whose honor had been the reward of their virtue, from which their posterity were never once known to degenerate. To these were joined several holy persons, as part of that assembly, under the title of Bishops, whose peculiar business it is to take care of religion, and of those who instruct the people therein. These were searched and sought out through the whole nation, by the prince and his wisest counselors, among such of the priesthood as were most deservedly distinguished by the sanctity of their lives and the depth of their erudition, who were indeed the spiritual fathers of the clergy and the people.

That the other part of the Parliament consisted of an assembly called the House of Commons, who were all principal gentlemen, freely picked and culled out by the people themselves, for their great abilities and love of their country, to represent the wisdom of the whole nation. And these two bodies make up the most august assembly in Europe, to whom, in conjunction with the prince, the whole legislature is committed.

I then descended to the Courts of Justice, over which the Judges, those venerable sages and interpreters of the law, presided, for determining the disputed rights and properties of men, as well as for the punishment of vice, and protection of innocence. I mentioned the prudent management of our treasury, the valor and achievements of our forces by sea and land. I computed the number of our people, by reckoning how many millions there might be of

each religious sect, or political party among us. I did not omit even our sports and pastimes, or any other particular which I thought might redound to the honor of my country. And I finished all with a brief historical account of affairs and events in England for about an hundred years past.

This conversation was not ended under five audiences, each of several hours, and the King heard the whole with great attention, frequently taking notes of what I spoke, as well as memorandums of several questions he intended to ask me.

When I had put an end to these long discourses, his Majesty in a sixth audience consulting his notes, proposed many doubts, queries, and objections, upon every article. He asked what methods were used to cultivate the minds and bodies of our young nobility, and in what kind of business they commonly spent the first and teachable part of their lives. What course was taken to supply that assembly when any noble family became extinct. What qualifications were necessary in those who were to be created new lords. Whether the humor<sup>9</sup> of the prince, a sum of money to a Court lady or a prime minister, or a design of strengthening a party opposite to the public interest, ever happened to be motives in those advancements. What share of knowledge these lords had in the laws of their country, and how they came by it, so as to enable them to decide the properties of their fellow subjects in the last resort. Whether they were always so free from avarice, partialities, or want that a bribe or some other sinister view could have no place among them. Whether those holy lords I spoke of were constantly promoted to that rank upon account of their knowledge in religious matters, and the sanctity of their lives; had never been compliers with the times while they were common priests, or slavish prostitute chaplains to some nobleman, whose opinions they continued servilely to follow after they were admitted into that assembly.

He then desired to know what arts were practiced in electing those whom I called Commoners. Whether a stranger with a strong purse might not influence the vulgar voters to choose him before their own landlord or the most considerable gentleman in the

neighborhood. How it came to pass that people were so violently bent upon getting into this assembly, which I allowed to be a great trouble and expense, often to the ruin of their families, without any salary or pension: because this appeared such an exalted strain of virtue and public spirit that his Majesty seemed to doubt it might possibly not be always sincere; and he desired to know whether such zealous gentlemen could have any views of refunding themselves for the charges and trouble they were at, by sacrificing the public good to the designs of a weak and vicious prince in conjunction with a corrupted ministry. He multiplied his questions, and sifted me thoroughly upon every part of this head, proposing numberless inquiries and objections, which I think it not prudent or convenient to repeat.

Upon what I said in relation to our Courts of Justice, his Majesty desired to be satisfied in several points: and this I was the better able to do, having been formerly almost ruined by a long suit in chancery, which was decreed for me with costs. He asked what time was usually spent in determining between right and wrong, and what degree of expense. Whether advocates and orators had liberty to plead in causes manifestly known to be unjust, vexatious, or oppressive. Whether party in religion or politics were observed to be of any weight in the scale of justice. Whether those pleading orators were persons educated in the general knowledge of equity, or only in provincial, national, and other local customs. Whether they or their judges had any part in penning those laws which they assumed the liberty of interpreting and glossing upon at their pleasure. Whether they had ever at different times pleaded for and against the same cause, and cited precedents to prove contrary opinions. Whether they were a rich or a poor corporation. Whether they received any pecuniary reward for pleading or delivering their opinions. And particularly whether they were ever admitted as members in the lower senate.

He fell next upon the management of our treasury, and said he thought my memory had failed me, because I computed our taxes at about five or six millions a year, and when I came to mention the



issues,<sup>1</sup> he found they sometimes amounted to more than double, for the notes he had taken were very particular in this point; because he hoped, as he told me, that the knowledge of our conduct might be useful to him, and he could not be deceived in his calculations. But if what I told him were true, he was still at a loss how a kingdom could run out of its estate like a private person. He asked me, who were our creditors? and where we should find money to pay them? He wondered to hear me talk of such chargeable and extensive wars; that certainly we must be a quarrelsome people, or live among very bad neighbors, and that our generals must needs be richer than our kings.<sup>2</sup> He asked what business we had out of our own islands, unless upon the score of trade or treaty or to defend the coasts with our fleet. Above all, he was amazed to hear me talk of a mercenary standing army<sup>3</sup> in the midst of peace, and among a free people. He said if we were governed by our own consent in the persons of our representatives, he could not imagine of whom we were afraid, or against whom we were to fight; and would hear my opinion whether a private man's house might not better be defended by himself, his children, and family, than by half a dozen rascals picked up at a venture<sup>4</sup> in the streets for small wages, who might get an hundred times more by cutting their throats.

He laughed at my odd kind of arithmetic (as he was pleased to call it) in reckoning the numbers of our people by a computation drawn from the several sects among us in religion and politics. He said he knew no reason why those who entertain opinions prejudicial to the public should be obliged to change, or should not be obliged to conceal them. And as it was tyranny in any government to require the first, so it was weakness not to enforce the second: for a man may be allowed to keep poisons in his closet, but not to vend them about for cordials.<sup>5</sup>

He observed that among the diversions of our nobility and gentry I had mentioned gaming. He desired to know at what age this entertainment was usually taken up, and when it was laid down; how much of their time it employed; whether it ever went so high as to affect their fortunes; whether mean, vicious people, by their

dexterity in that art, might not arrive at great riches, and sometimes keep our very nobles in dependence, as well as habituate them to vile companions, wholly take them from the improvement of their minds, and force them, by the losses they received, to learn and practice that infamous dexterity upon others.

He was perfectly astonished with the historical account I gave him of our affairs during the last century, protesting it was only an heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, revolutions, banishments, the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice, or ambition could produce.

His Majesty in another audience was at the pains to recapitulate the sum of all I had spoken; compared the questions he made with the answers I had given; then taking me into his hands, and stroking me gently, delivered himself in these words, which I shall never forget, nor the manner he spoke them in. "My little friend Grildrig, you have made a most admirable panegyric upon your country. You have clearly proved that ignorance, idleness, and vice are the proper ingredients for qualifying a legislator. That laws are best explained, interpreted, and applied by those whose interests and abilities lie in perverting, confounding, and eluding them. I observe among you some lines of an institution which in its original might have been tolerable; but these half erased, and the rest wholly blurred and blotted by corruptions. It doth not appear from all you have said how any one virtue is required towards the procurement of any one station among you; much less that men are ennobled on account of their virtue, that priests are advanced for their piety or learning, soldiers for their conduct or valor, judges for their integrity, senators for the love of their country, or counselors for their wisdom. As for yourself," continued the King, "who have spent the greatest part of your life in traveling, I am well disposed to hope you may hitherto have escaped many vices of your country. But by what I have gathered from your own relation, and the answers I have with much pains wringed and extorted from you, I cannot but conclude the bulk

of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.”

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Skillfully.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Trifles.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Concerts.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Great orators of Athens and Rome, respectively.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Temperateness.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The House of Lords. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Whim.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Expenditures.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An allusion to the enormous fortune gained by the Duke of Marlborough, formerly captain-general of the army, whom Swift detested.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Since the declaration of the Bill of Rights (1689), a standing army without authorization by Parliament had been illegal. Swift and the Tories in general were vigilant in their opposition to such an army.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: By chance.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Medicines to stimulate the heart, or, equally commonly, liqueurs.[Return to reference 5](#)

CHAPTER 7. *The Author's love of his country. He makes a proposal of much advantage to the King; which is rejected. The King's great ignorance in politics. The learning of that country very imperfect and confined. Their laws, and military affairs, and parties in the State.*

Nothing but an extreme love of truth could have hindered me from concealing this part of my story. It was in vain to discover my resentments, which were always turned into ridicule: and I was forced to rest with patience while my noble and most beloved country was so injuriously treated. I am heartily sorry as any of my readers can possibly be that such an occasion was given, but this prince happened to be so curious and inquisitive upon every particular that it could not consist either with gratitude or good manners to refuse giving him what satisfaction I was able. Yet thus much I may be allowed to say in my own vindication: that I artfully eluded many of his questions, and gave to every point a more favorable turn by many degrees than the strictness of truth would allow. For I have always borne that laudable partiality to my own country, which Dionysius Halicarnassensis<sup>6</sup> with so much justice recommends to an historian. I would hide the frailties and deformities of my political mother, and place her virtues and beauties in the most advantageous light. This was my sincere endeavor in those many discourses I had with that mighty monarch, although it unfortunately failed of success.

But great allowances should be given to a King who lives wholly secluded from the rest of the world, and must therefore be altogether unacquainted with the manners and customs that most prevail in other nations: the want of which knowledge will ever produce many *prejudices*, and a certain *narrowness of thinking*, from which we and the politer countries of Europe are wholly exempted. And it would be hard indeed if so remote a prince's notions of virtue and vice were to be offered as a standard for all mankind.

To confirm what I have now said, and further to show the miserable effects of a *confined education*, I shall here insert a passage which will hardly obtain belief. In hopes to ingratiate myself

farther into his Majesty's favor, I told him of an invention discovered between three and four hundred years ago, to make a certain powder, into an heap of which the smallest spark of fire falling would kindle the whole in a moment, although it were as big as a mountain, and make it all fly up in the air together, with a noise and agitation greater than thunder. That a proper quantity of this powder rammed into an hollow tube of brass or iron, according to its bigness, would drive a ball of iron or lead with such violence and speed as nothing was able to sustain its force. That the largest balls thus discharged would not only destroy whole ranks of an army at once, but batter the strongest walls to the ground; sink down ships with a thousand men in each, to the bottom of the sea; and, when linked together by a chain, would cut through masts and rigging; divide hundreds of bodies in the middle, and lay all waste before them. That we often put this powder into large hollow balls of iron, and discharged them by an engine into some city we were besieging; which would rip up the pavements, tear the houses to pieces, burst and throw splinters on every side, dashing out the brains of all who came near. That I knew the ingredients very well, which were cheap and common; I understood the manner of compounding them, and could direct his workmen how to make those tubes of a size proportionable to all other things in his Majesty's kingdom, and the largest need not be above two hundred foot long; twenty or thirty of which tubes, charged with the proper quantity of powder and balls, would batter down the walls of the strongest town in his dominions in a few hours; or destroy the whole metropolis, if ever it should pretend to dispute his absolute commands. This I humbly, offered to his Majesty as a small tribute of acknowledgement in return of so many marks that I had received of his royal favor and protection.

The King was struck with horror at the description I had given of those terrible engines and the proposal I had made. He was amazed how so impotent and groveling an insect as I (these were his expressions) could entertain such inhuman ideas, and in so familiar a manner as to appear wholly unmoved at all the scenes of blood and

desolation which I had painted as the common effects of those destructive machines; whereof he said some evil genius, enemy to mankind, must have been the first contriver. As for himself, he protested that although few things delighted him so much as new discoveries in art or in nature, yet he would rather lose half his kingdom than be privy to such a secret, which he commanded me, as I valued my life, never to mention any more.

A strange effect of *narrow principles* and *short views!* that a prince possessed of every quality which procures veneration, love, and esteem; of strong parts, great wisdom, and profound learning; endued with admirable talents for government, and almost adored by his subjects; should from a *nice, unnecessary scruple*, whereof in Europe we can have no conception, let slip an opportunity put into his hands that would have made him absolute master of the lives, the liberties, and the fortunes of his people. Neither do I say this with the least intention to detract from the many virtues of that excellent King, whose character I am sensible will on this account be very much lessened in the opinion of an English reader: but I take this defect among them to have risen from their ignorance; they not having hitherto reduced politics into a science, as the more acute wits of Europe have done. For I remember very well, in a discourse one day with the King, when I happened to say there were several thousand books among us written upon the art of government, it gave him (directly contrary to my intention) a very mean opinion of our understandings. He professed both to abominate and despise all *mystery, refinement, and intrigue*, either in a prince or a minister. He could not tell what I meant by *secrets of state*, where an enemy or some rival nation were not in the case. He confined the knowledge of governing within very *narrow bounds*: to common sense and reason, to justice and lenity, to the speedy determination of civil and criminal causes, with some other obvious topics which are not worth considering. And he gave it for his opinion that whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before would deserve better of

mankind and do more essential service to his country than the whole race of politicians<sup>7</sup> put together.

The learning of this people is very defective, consisting only in morality, history, poetry, and mathematics; wherein they must be allowed to excel. But the last of these is wholly applied to what may be useful in life, to the improvement of agriculture and all mechanical arts; so that among us it would be little esteemed. And as to ideas, entities, abstractions, and transcendentals,<sup>8</sup> I could never drive the least conception into their heads.

No law of that country must exceed in words the number of letters in their alphabet, which consists only in two and twenty. But indeed few of them extend even to that length. They are expressed in the most plain and simple terms, wherein those people are not mercurial enough to discover above one interpretation. And to write a comment upon any law is a capital crime. As to the decision of civil causes, or proceedings against criminals, their precedents are so few that they have little reason to boast of any extraordinary skill in either.

They have had the art of printing as well as the Chinese, time out of mind. But their libraries are not very large; for that of the King's, which is reckoned the biggest, doth not amount to above a thousand volumes, placed in a gallery of twelve hundred foot long, from whence I had liberty to borrow what books I pleased. The Queen's joiner had contrived in one of the Glumdalclitch's rooms a kind of wooden machine five and twenty foot high, formed like a standing ladder; the steps were each fifty foot long. It was indeed a movable pair of stairs, the lowest end placed at ten foot distance from the wall of the chamber. The book I had a mind to read was put up leaning against the wall. I first mounted to the upper step of the ladder, and turning my face towards the book began at the top of the page, and so walking to the right and left about eight or ten paces according to the length of the lines, till I had gotten a little below the level of mine eyes, and then descending gradually till I came to the bottom: after which I mounted again, and began the other page in the same manner, and so turned over the leaf, which I

could easily do with both my hands, for it was as thick and stiff as a pasteboard, and in the largest folios not above eighteen or twenty foot long.

Their style is clear, masculine, and smooth, but not florid; for they avoid nothing more than multiplying unnecessary words or using various expressions. I have perused many of their books, especially those in history and morality. Among the rest, I was much diverted with a little old treatise, which always lay in Glumdalclitch's bedchamber, and belonged to her governess, a grave elderly gentlewoman, who dealt in writings of morality and devotion. The book treats of the weakness of human kind, and is in little esteem, except among the women and the vulgar. However, I was curious to see what an author of that country could say upon such a subject. This writer went through all the usual topics of European moralists: showing how diminutive, contemptible, and helpless an animal was man in his own nature; how unable to defend himself from the inclemencies of the air, or the fury of wild beasts; how much he was excelled by one creature in strength, by another in speed, by a third in foresight, by a fourth in industry. He added that nature was degenerated in these latter declining ages of the world, and could now produce only small abortive births in comparison of those in ancient times. He said it was very reasonable to think, not only that the species of men were originally much larger, but also that there must have been giants in former ages; which, as it is asserted by history and tradition, so it hath been confirmed by huge bones and skulls casually dug up in several parts of the kingdom, far exceeding the common dwindled race of man in our days. He argued that the very laws of nature absolutely required we should have been made in the beginning of a size more large and robust, not so liable to destruction from every little accident of a tile falling from a house, or a stone cast from the hand of a boy, or of being drowned in a little brook. From this way of reasoning, the author drew several moral applications useful in the conduct of life, but needless here to repeat. For my own part, I could not avoid reflecting how universally this talent was spread, of drawing lectures in morality, or indeed



rather matter of discontent and repining, from the quarrels we raise with nature. And I believe, upon a strict inquiry, those quarrels might be shown as ill grounded among us as they are among that people.

As to their military affairs, they boast that the King's army consists of an hundred and seventy-six thousand foot and thirty-two thousand horse: if that may be called an army which is made up of tradesmen in the several cities, and farmers in the country, whose commanders are only the nobility and gentry, without pay or reward. They are indeed perfect enough in their exercises, and under very good discipline, wherein I saw no great merit; for how should it be otherwise, where every farmer is under the command of his own landlord, and every citizen under that of the principal men in his own city, chosen after the manner of Venice by ballot?

I have often seen the militia of Lorbrulgrud drawn out to exercise in a great field near the city, of twenty miles square. They were in all not above twenty-five thousand foot, and six thousand horse; but it was impossible for me to compute their number, considering the space of ground they took up. A cavalier mounted on a large steed might be about an hundred foot high. I have seen this whole body of horse, upon a word of command, draw their swords at once, and brandish them in the air. Imagination can figure nothing so grand, so surprising, and so astonishing. It looked as if ten thousand flashes of lightning were darting at the same time from every quarter of the sky.

I was curious to know how this prince, to whose dominions there is no access from any other country, came to think of armies, or to teach his people the practice of military discipline. But I was soon informed, both by conversation and reading their histories. For in the course of many ages they have been troubled with the same disease to which the whole race of mankind is subject: the nobility often contending for power, the people for liberty, and the King for absolute dominion. All which, however happily tempered by the laws of the kingdom, have been sometimes violated by each of the three parties, and have more than once occasioned civil wars, the last whereof was happily put an end to by this prince's grandfather in a

general composition;<sup>9</sup> and the militia, then settled with common consent, hath been ever since kept in the strictest duty.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: A Greek rhetorician and historian, who flourished ca. 25 B.C.E. His history of Rome was written to reconcile the Greeks to their Roman masters.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Swift means something like our modern political scientists or theorists.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In Swift's time, *transcendental* was practically synonymous with *metaphysical*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A political settlement based on general agreement of all parties.[Return to reference 9](#)

CHAPTER 8. *The King and Queen make a progress to the frontiers. The Author attends them. The manner in which he leaves the country very particularly related. He returns to England.*

I had always a strong impulse that I should some time recover my liberty, though it were impossible to conjecture by what means, or to form any project with the least hope of succeeding. The ship in which I sailed was the first ever known to be driven within sight of that coast; and the King had given strict orders that if at any time another appeared, it should be taken ashore, and with all its crew and passengers brought in a tumbrel<sup>1</sup> to Lorbrulgrud. He was strongly bent to get me a woman of my own size, by whom I might propagate the breed: but I think I should rather have died than undergone the disgrace of leaving a posterity to be kept in cages like tame canary birds, and perhaps in time sold about the kingdom to persons of quality for curiosities. I was indeed treated with much kindness: I was the favorite of a great King and Queen, and the delight of the whole Court, but it was upon such a foot as ill became the dignity of human kind. I could never forget those domestic pledges I had left behind me. I wanted to be among people with whom I could converse upon even terms, and walk about the streets and fields without fear of being trod to death like a frog or a young puppy. But my deliverance came sooner than I expected, and in a manner not very common; the whole story and circumstances of which I shall faithfully relate.

I had now been two years in this country; and about the beginning of the third, Glumdalclitch and I attended the King and Queen in progress to the south coast of the kingdom. I was carried as usual in my traveling box, which, as I have already described, was a very convenient closet of twelve foot wide. I had ordered a hammock to be fixed by silken ropes from the four corners at the top, to break the jolts when a servant carried me before him on horseback, as I sometimes desired; and would often sleep in my hammock while we were upon the road. On the roof of my closet, set not directly over the middle of the hammock, I ordered the joiner

to cut out a hole of a foot square to give me air in hot weather as I slept, which hole I shut at pleasure with a board that drew backwards and forwards through a groove.

When we came to our journey's end, the King thought proper to pass a few days at a palace he hath near Flanflasnic, a city within eighteen English miles of the seaside. Glumdalclitch and I were much fatigued; I had gotten a small cold, but the poor girl was so ill as to be confined to her chamber. I longed to see the ocean, which must be the only scene of my escape, if ever it should happen. I pretended to be worse than I really was, and desired leave to take the fresh air of the sea with a page whom I was very fond of, and who had sometimes been trusted with me. I shall never forget with what unwillingness Glumdalclitch consented, nor the strict charge she gave the page to be careful of me, bursting at the same time into a flood of tears, as if she had some foreboding of what was to happen. The boy took me out in my box about half an hour's walk from the palace, towards the rocks on the seashore. I ordered him to set me down, and lifting up one of my sashes, cast many a wistful melancholy look towards the sea. I found myself not very well, and told the page that I had a mind to take a nap in my hammock, which I hoped would do me good. I got in, and the boy shut the window close down, to keep out the cold. I soon fell asleep: and all I can conjecture is that while I slept, the page, thinking no danger could happen, went among the rocks to look for birds' eggs; having before observed him from my window searching about, and picking up one or two in the clefts. Be that as it will, I found myself suddenly awaked with a violent pull upon the ring which was fastened at the top of my box for the conveniency of carriage. I felt my box raised very high in the air, and then borne forward with prodigious speed. The first jolt had like to have shaken me out of my hammock, but afterwards the motion was easy enough. I called out several times as loud as I could raise my voice, but all to no purpose. I looked towards my windows, and could see nothing but the clouds and sky. I heard a noise just over my head like the clapping of wings, and then began to perceive the woeful condition I was in; that some

eagle had got the ring of my box in his beak, with an intent to let it fall on a rock, like a tortoise in a shell, and then pick out my body and devour it. For the sagacity and smell of this bird enable him to discover his quarry at a great distance, although better concealed than I could be within a two-inch board.

In a little time I observed the noise and flutter of wings to increase very fast, and my box was tossed up and down like a signpost in a windy day. I heard several bangs or buffets, as I thought, given to the eagle (for such I am certain it must have been that held the ring of my box in his beak), and then all on a sudden felt myself falling perpendicularly down for above a minute, but with such incredible swiftness that I almost lost my breath. My fall was topped by a terrible squash, that sounded louder to mine ears than the cataract of Niagara; after which I was quite in the dark for another minute, and then my box began to rise so high that I could see light from the tops of my windows. I now perceived that I was fallen into the sea. My box, by the weight of my body, the goods that were in, and the broad plates of iron fixed for strength at the four corners of the top and bottom, floated above five foot deep in water. I did then and do now suppose that the eagle which flew away with my box was pursued by two or three others, and forced to let me drop while he was defending himself against the rest, who hoped to share in the prey. The plates of iron fastened at the bottom of the box (for those were the strongest) preserved the balance while it fell, and hindered it from being broken on the surface of the water. Every joint of it was well grooved, and the door did not move on hinges, but up and down like a sash; which kept my closet so tight that very little water came in. I got with much difficulty out of my hammock, having first ventured to draw back the slip-board on the roof already mentioned, contrived on purpose to let in air, for want of which I found myself almost stifled.

How often did I then wish myself with my dear Glumdalclitch, from whom one single hour had so far divided me! And I may say with truth that in the midst of my own misfortune, I could not forbear lamenting my poor nurse, the grief she would suffer for my

loss, the displeasure of the Queen, and the ruin of her fortune. Perhaps many travelers have not been under greater difficulties and distress than I was at this juncture, expecting every moment to see my box dashed in pieces, or at least upset by the first violent blast or a rising wave. A breach in one single pane of glass would have been immediate death, nor could anything have preserved the windows but the strong lattice wires placed on the outside against accidents in traveling. I saw the water ooze in at several crannies, although the leaks were not considerable, and I endeavored to stop them as well as I could. I was not able to lift up the roof of my closet, which otherwise I certainly should have done, and sat on the top of it, where I might at least preserve myself from being shut up, as I may call it, in the hold. Or, if I escaped these dangers for a day or two, what could I expect but a miserable death of cold and hunger! I was four hours under these circumstances, expecting and indeed wishing every moment to be my last.

I have already told the reader that there were two strong staples fixed upon that side of my box which had no window and into which the servant, who used to carry me on horseback, would put a leathern belt, and buckle it about his waist. Being in this disconsolate state, I heard, or at least thought I heard, some kind of grating noise on that side of my box where the staples were fixed; and soon after I began to fancy that the box was pulled or towed along in the sea; for I now and then felt a sort of tugging, which made the waves rise near the tops of my windows, leaving me almost in the dark. This gave me some faint hopes of relief, although I was not able to imagine how it could be brought about. I ventured to unscrew one of my chairs, which were always fastened to the floor; and having made a hard shift to screw it down again directly under the slipping-board that I had lately opened, I mounted on the chair, and putting my mouth as near as I could to the hole, I called for help in a loud voice, and in all the languages I understood. I then fastened my handkerchief to a stick I usually carried, and thrusting it up the hole, waved it several times in the air, that if any boat or ship

were near, the seamen might conjecture some unhappy mortal to be shut up in the box.

I found no effect from all I could do, but plainly perceived my closet to be moved along; and in the space of an hour or better, that side of the box where the staples were, and had no window, struck against something that was hard. I apprehended it to be a rock, and found myself tossed more than ever. I plainly heard a noise upon the cover of my closet, like that of a cable, and the grating of it as it passed through the ring. I then found myself hoisted up by degrees at least three foot higher than I was before. Whereupon I again thrust up my stick and handkerchief, calling for help till I was almost hoarse. In return to which, I heard a great shout repeated three times, giving me such transports of joy as are not to be conceived but by those who feel them. I now heard a trampling over my head, and somebody calling through the hole with a loud voice in the English tongue: "If there be anybody below, let them speak." I answered, I was an Englishman, drawn by ill fortune into the greatest calamity that ever any creature underwent, and begged, by all that was moving, to be delivered out of the dungeon I was in. The voice replied, I was safe, for my box was fastened to their ship; and the carpenter should immediately come and saw an hole in the cover, large enough to pull me out. I answered, that was needless and would take up too much time, for there was no more to be done but let one of the crew put his finger into the ring, and take the box out of the sea into the ship, and so into the captain's cabin. Some of them, upon hearing me talk so wildly, thought I was mad; others laughed; for indeed it never came into my head that I was now got among people of my own stature and strength. The carpenter came, and in a few minutes sawed a passage about four foot square; then let down a small ladder, upon which I mounted, and from thence was taken into the ship in a very weak condition.

The sailors were all in amazement, and asked me a thousand questions, which I had no inclination to answer. I was equally confounded at the sight of so many pygmies, for such I took them to be, after having so long accustomed my eyes to the monstrous

objects I had left. But the Captain, Mr. Thomas Wilcocks, an honest, worthy Shropshire man, observing I was ready to faint, took me into his cabin, gave me a cordial to comfort me, and made me turn in upon his own bed, advising me to take a little rest, of which I had great need. Before I went to sleep I gave him to understand that I had some valuable furniture in my box, too good to be lost, a fine hammock, an handsome field bed, two chairs, a table, and a cabinet; that my closet was hung on all sides, or rather quilted with silk and cotton; that if he would let one of the crew bring my closet into his cabin, I would open it before him and show him my goods. The Captain, hearing me utter these absurdities, concluded I was raving; however (I suppose to pacify me), he promised to give order as I desired, and going upon deck, sent some of his men down into my closet, from whence (as I afterwards found) they drew up all my goods and stripped off the quilting; but the chairs, cabinet, and bedstead, being screwed to the floor, were much damaged by the ignorance of the seamen, who tore them up by force. Then they knocked off some of the boards for the use of the ship; and when they had got all they had a mind for, let the hulk drop into the sea, which, by reason of many breaches made in the bottom and sides, sunk to rights.<sup>2</sup> And indeed I was glad not to have been a spectator of the havoc they made, because I am confident it would have sensibly touched me, by bringing former passages into my mind, which I had rather forget.

I slept some hours, but perpetually disturbed with dreams of the place I had left, and the dangers I had escaped. However, upon waking, I found myself much recovered. It was now about eight o'clock at night, and the Captain ordered supper immediately, thinking I had already fasted too long. He entertained me with great kindness, observing me not to look wildly, or talk inconsistently; and when we were left alone, desired I would give him a relation of my travels, and by what accident I came to be set adrift in that monstrous wooden chest. He said that about twelve o'clock at noon, as he was looking through his glass, he spied it at a distance, and thought it was a sail, which he had a mind to make,<sup>3</sup> being not



much out of his course, in hopes of buying some biscuit, his own beginning to fall short. That, upon coming nearer, and finding his error, he sent out his longboat to discover what I was; that his men came back in a fright, swearing they had seen a swimming house. That he laughed at their folly, and went himself in the boat, ordering his men to take a strong cable along with them. That the weather being calm, he rowed round me several times, observed my windows, and the wire lattices that defended them. That he discovered two staples upon one side, which was all of boards, without any passage for light. He then commanded his men to row up to that side, and fastening a cable to one of the staples, ordered his men to tow my chest (as he called it) towards the ship. When it was there, he gave directions to fasten another cable to the ring fixed in the cover, and to raise up my chest with pulleys, which all the sailors were not able to do above two or three foot. He said they saw my stick and handkerchief thrust out of the hole, and concluded that some unhappy man must be shut up in the cavity. I asked whether he or the crew had seen any prodigious birds in the air about the time he first discovered me. To which he answered that, discoursing this matter with the sailors while I was asleep, one of them said he had observed three eagles flying towards the north, but remarked nothing of their being larger than the usual size (which I suppose must be imputed to the great height they were at), and he could not guess the reason of my question. I then asked the Captain how far he reckoned we might be from land; he said, by the best computation he could make, we were at least an hundred leagues. I assured him that he must be mistaken by almost half; for I had not left the country from whence I came above two hours before I dropped into the sea. Whereupon he began again to think that my brain was disturbed, of which he gave me a hint, and advised me to go to bed in a cabin he had provided. I assured him I was well refreshed with his good entertainment and company, and as much in my senses as ever I was in my life. He then grew serious and desired to ask me freely whether I were not troubled in mind by the consciousness of some enormous crime, for which I was punished at the command of some prince, by exposing me in that

chest, as great criminals in other countries have been forced to sea in a leaky vessel without provisions; for although he should be sorry to have taken so ill<sup>4</sup> a man into his ship, yet he would engage his word to set me safe on shore in the first port where we arrived. He added that his suspicions were much increased by some very absurd speeches I had delivered at first to the sailors, and afterwards to himself, in relation to my closet or chest, as well as by my odd looks and behavior while I was at supper.

I begged his patience to hear me tell my story, which I faithfully did from the last time I left England to the moment he first discovered me. And as truth always forceth its way into rational minds, so this honest, worthy gentleman, who had some tincture of learning, and very good sense, was immediately convinced of my candor and veracity. But further to confirm all I had said, I entreated him to give order that my cabinet should be brought, of which I kept the key in my pocket (for he had already informed me how the seamen disposed of my closet). I opened it in his presence and showed him the small collection of rarities I made in the country from whence I had been so strangely delivered. There was the comb I had contrived out of the stumps of the King's beard, and another of the same materials, but fixed into a paring of her Majesty's thumbnail, which served for the back. There was a collection of needles and pins from a foot to half a yard long; four wasp-stings, like joiners' tacks; some combings of the Queen's hair; a gold ring which one day she made me a present of in a most obliging manner, taking it from her little finger, and throwing it over my head like a collar. I desired the Captain would please to accept this ring in return for his civilities, which he absolutely refused. I showed him a corn that I had cut off with my own hand from a Maid of Honor's toe; it was about the bigness of a Kentish pippin, and grown so hard that, when I returned to England, I got it hollowed into a cup and set in silver. Lastly, I desired him to see the breeches I had then on, which were made of a mouse's skin.

I could force nothing on him but a footman's tooth, which I observed him to examine with great curiosity, and found he had a

fancy for it. He received it with abundance of thanks, more than such a trifle could deserve. It was drawn by an unskillful surgeon in a mistake from one of Glumdalclitch's men, who was afflicted with the toothache; but it was as sound as any in his head. I got it cleaned, and put it into my cabinet. It was about a foot long, and four inches in diameter.

The Captain was very well satisfied with this plain relation I had given him, and said he hoped when we returned to England I would oblige the world by putting it in paper and making it public. My answer was that I thought we were already overstocked with books of travels; that nothing could now pass which was not extraordinary; wherein I doubted some authors less consulted truth than their own vanity or interest, or the diversion of ignorant readers. That my story could contain little besides common events, without those ornamental descriptions of strange plants, trees, birds, and other animals, or the barbarous customs and idolatry of savage people, with which most writers abound. However, I thanked him for his good opinion, and promised to take the matter into my thoughts.

He said he wondered at one thing very much, which was to hear me speak so loud, asking me whether the King or Queen of that country were thick of hearing. I told him it was what I had been used to for above two years past, and that I admired<sup>5</sup> as much at the voices of him and his men, who seemed to me only to whisper, and yet I could hear them well enough. But, when I spoke in that country, it was like a man talking in the street to another looking out from the top of a steeple, unless when I was placed on a table, or held in any person's hand. I told him I had likewise observed another thing: that when I first got into the ship, and the sailors stood all about me, I thought they were the most little contemptible creatures I had ever beheld. For indeed while I was in that prince's country, I could never endure to look in a glass after my eyes had been accustomed to such prodigious objects, because the comparison gave me so despicable a conceit<sup>6</sup> of myself. The Captain said that while we were at supper he observed me to look at everything with a sort of wonder, and that I often seemed hardly

able to contain my laughter; which he knew not well how to take, but imputed it to some disorder in my brain. I answered, it was very true; and I wondered how I could forbear, when I saw his dishes of the size of a silver threepence, a leg of pork hardly a mouthful, a cup not so big as a nutshell; and so I went on, describing the rest of his household stuff and provisions after the same manner. For, although the Queen had ordered a little equipage of all things necessary for me while I was in her service, yet my ideas were wholly taken up with what I saw on every side of me, and I winked at my own littleness, as people do at their own faults. The Captain understood my raillery very well, and merrily replied with the old English proverb, that he doubted<sup>7</sup> my eyes were bigger than my belly, for he did not observe my stomach so good, although I had fasted all day; and continuing in his mirth, protested he would have gladly given an hundred pounds to have seen my closet in the eagle's bill, and afterwards in its fall from so great an height into the sea; which would certainly have been a most astonishing object, worthy to have the description of it transmitted to future ages: and the comparison of Phaeton<sup>8</sup> was so obvious, that he could not forbear applying it, although I did not much admire the conceit.

The Captain having been at Tonquin,<sup>9</sup> was in his return to England driven northeastward to the latitude of 44 degrees, and of longitude 143. But meeting a trade wind two days after I came on board him, we sailed southward a long time, and coasting New Holland<sup>1</sup> kept our course west-southwest, and then south-southwest till we doubled the Cape of Good Hope. Our voyage was very prosperous, but I shall not trouble the reader with a journal of it. The Captain called in at one or two ports, and sent in his longboat for provisions and fresh water; but I never went out of the ship till we came into the Downs, which was on the third day of June, 1706, about nine months after my escape. I offered to leave my goods in security for payment of my freight; but the Captain protested he would not receive one farthing. We took kind leave of each other, and I made him promise he would come to see me at my house in

Redriff. I hired a horse and guide for five shillings, which I borrowed of the Captain.

As I was on the road, observing the littleness of the houses, the trees, the cattle, and the people, I began to think myself in Lilliput. I was afraid of trampling on every traveler I met, and often called aloud to have them stand out of the way, so that I had like to have gotten one or two broken heads for my impertinence.

When I came to my own house, for which I was forced to inquire, one of the servants opening the door, I bent down to go in (like a goose under a gate) for fear of striking my head. My wife ran out to embrace me, but I stooped lower than her knees, thinking she could otherwise never be able to reach my mouth. My daughter kneeled to ask my blessing, but I could not see her till she arose, having been so long used to stand with my head and eyes erect to above sixty foot; and then I went to take her up with one hand by the waist. I looked down upon the servants and one or two friends who were in the house, as if they had been pygmies and I a giant. I told my wife she had been too thrifty; for I found she had starved herself and her daughter to nothing. In short, I behaved myself so unaccountably that they were all of the Captain's opinion when he first saw me, and concluded I had lost my wits. This I mention as an instance of the great power of habit and prejudice.

In a little time I and my family and friends came to a right understanding; but my wife protested I should never go to sea any more, although my evil destiny so ordered that she had not power to hinder me; as the reader may know hereafter. In the meantime I here conclude the second part of my unfortunate voyages.

\* \* \* [2](#)

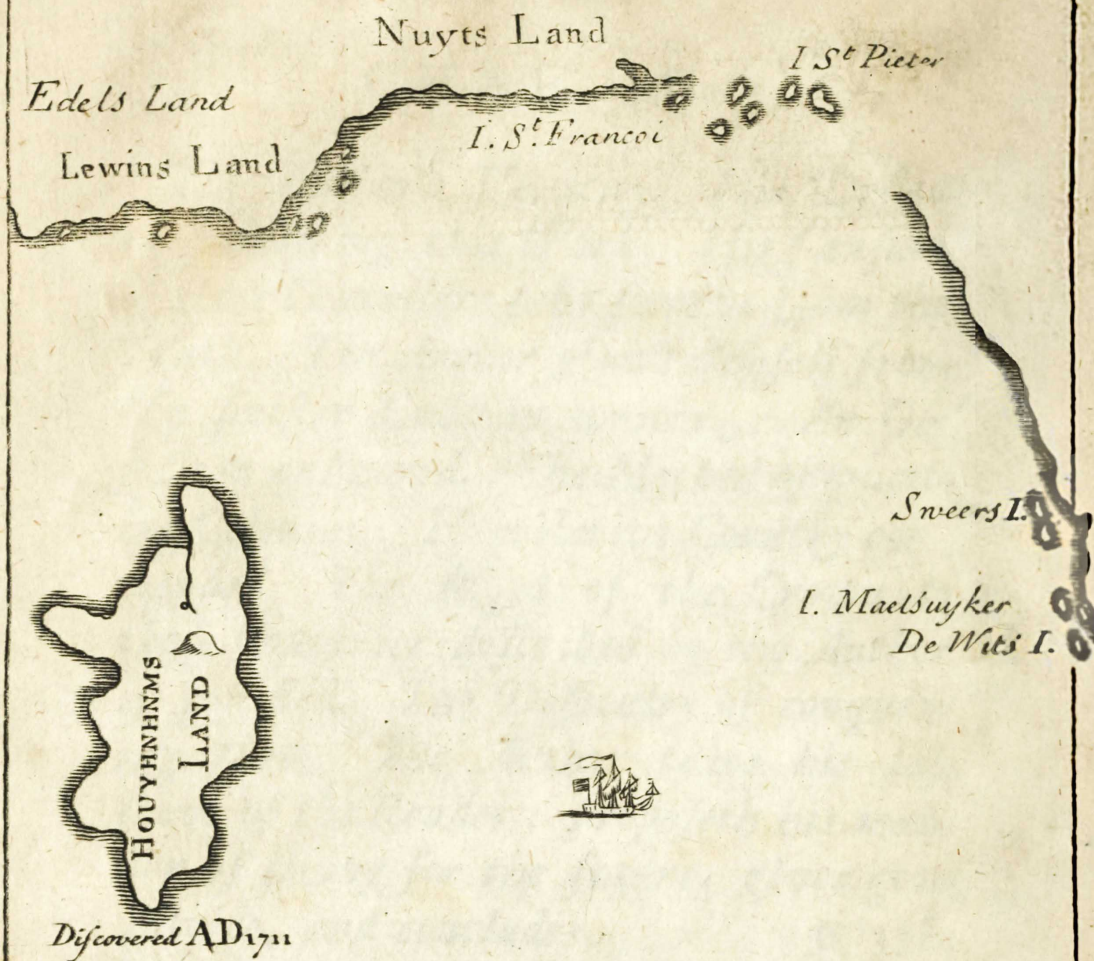
## Endnotes

- Note 1: A farm wagon. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: At once, altogether. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Overtake. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Evil.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Wondered.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Notion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Feared.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Son of Helios, the sun god, whose unsuccessful attempt to drive his father's chariot led to his death, when he lost control and was hurled by Zeus from the sky, falling into the river Eridanus, where he drowned.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Tonkin, now in Vietnam.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Australia.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In Part 3, Gulliver travels to many mostly fictional lands (though he does end up in Japan). Most notably he visits Laputa and the Academy of Lagado, which satirize useless abstract reasoning and the pointlessness of much modern science.[Return to reference 2](#)

***Part 4. A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms***<sup>3</sup>







---

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Pronounced *hwin-ims*. The word suggests the neigh characteristic of a horse.[Return to reference 3](#)

CHAPTER 1. *The Author sets out as Captain of a ship. His men conspire against him, confine him a long time to his cabin, set him on shore in an unknown land. He travels up into the country. The Yahoos, a strange sort of animal, described. The Author meets two Houyhnhnms.*

I continued at home with my wife and children about five months in a very happy condition, if I could have learned the lesson of knowing when I was well. I left my poor wife big with child, and accepted an advantageous offer made me to be Captain of the *Adventure*, a stout merchantman of 350 tons; for I understood navigation well, and being grown weary of a surgeon's employment at sea, which however I could exercise upon occasion, I took a skillful young man of that calling, one Robert Purefoy, into my ship. We set sail from Portsmouth upon the 7th day of September, 1710; on the 14th we met with Captain Pocock of Bristol, at Tenariff, who was going to the Bay of Campeachy<sup>4</sup> to cut logwood. On the 16th he was parted from us by a storm; I heard since my return that his ship foundered and none escaped, but one cabin boy. He was an honest man and a good sailor, but a little too positive in his own opinions, which was the cause of his destruction, as it hath been of several others. For if he had followed my advice, he might at this time have been safe at home with his family as well as myself.

I had several men died in my ship of calentures,<sup>5</sup> so that I was forced to get recruits out of Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands, where I touched by the direction of the merchants who employed me; which I had soon too much cause to repent, for I found afterwards that most of them had been buccaneers. I had fifty hands on board; and my orders were that I should trade with the Indians in the South Sea, and make what discoveries I could. These rogues whom I had picked up debauched my other men, and they all formed a conspiracy to seize the ship and secure me; which they did one morning, rushing into my cabin, and binding me hand and foot, threatening to throw me overboard, if I offered to stir. I told them I was their prisoner, and would submit. This they made me

swear to do, and then unbound me, only fastening one of my legs with a chain near my bed, and placed a sentry at my door with his piece charged, who was commanded to shoot me dead if I attempted my liberty. They sent me down victuals and drink, and took the government of the ship to themselves. Their design was to turn pirates and plunder the Spaniards, which they could not do, till they got more men. But first they resolved to sell the goods in the ship, and then go to Madagascar for recruits, several among them having died since my confinement. They sailed many weeks, and traded with the Indians; but I knew not what course they took, being kept close prisoner in my cabin, and expecting nothing less than to be murdered, as they often threatened me.

Upon the 9th day of May, 1711, one James Welch came down to my cabin; and said he had orders from the Captain to set me ashore. I expostulated with him, but in vain; neither would he so much as tell me who their new Captain was. They forced me into the longboat, letting me put on my best suit of clothes, which were as good as new, and a small bundle of linen, but no arms except my hanger; and they were so civil as not to search my pockets, into which I conveyed what money I had, with some other little necessities. They rowed about a league, and then set me down on a strand. I desired them to tell me what country it was; they all swore, they knew no more than myself, but said that the Captain (as they called him) was resolved, after they had sold the lading, to get rid of me in the first place where they discovered land. They pushed off immediately, advising me to make haste, for fear of being overtaken by the tide, and bade me farewell.

In this desolate condition I advanced forward, and soon got upon firm ground, where I sat down on a bank to rest myself, and consider what I had best to do. When I was a little refreshed, I went up into the country, resolving to deliver myself to the first savages I should meet, and purchase my life from them by some bracelets, glass rings, and other toys, which sailors usually provide themselves with in those voyages, and whereof I had some about me. The land was divided by long rows of trees, not regularly planted, but

naturally growing; there was great plenty of grass, and several fields of oats. I walked very circumspectly for fear of being surprised, or suddenly shot with an arrow from behind, or on either side. I fell into a beaten road, where I saw many tracks of human feet, and some of cows, but most of horses. At last I beheld several animals in a field, and one or two of the same kind sitting in trees. Their shape was very singular, and deformed, which a little discomposed me, so that I lay down behind a thicket to observe them better. Some of them coming forward near the place where I lay, gave me an opportunity of distinctly marking their form. Their heads and breasts were covered with a thick hair, some frizzled and others lank; they had beards like goats, and a long ridge of hair down their backs, and the fore parts of their legs and feet; but the rest of their bodies were bare, so that I might see their skins, which were of a brown buff color. They had no tails, nor any hair at all on their buttocks, except about the anus; which, I presume Nature had placed there to defend them as they sat on the ground; for this posture they used, as well as lying down, and often stood on their hind feet. They climbed high trees, as nimbly as a squirrel, for they had strong extended claws before and behind, terminating in sharp points, and hooked. They would often spring, and bound, and leap with prodigious agility. The females were not so large as the males; they had long lank hair on their heads, and only a sort of down on the rest of their bodies, except about the anus, and pudenda. Their dugs hung between their forefeet, and often reached almost to the ground as they walked. The hair of both sexes was of several colors, brown, red, black, and yellow. Upon the whole, I never beheld in all my travels so disagreeable an animal, or one against which I naturally conceived so strong an antipathy. So that thinking I had seen enough, full of contempt and aversion, I got up and pursued the beaten road, hoping it might direct me to the cabin of some Indian. I had not gone far when I met one of these creatures full in my way, and coming up directly to me. The ugly monster, when he saw me, distorted several ways every feature of his visage, and stared as at an object he had never seen before; then approaching nearer, lifted up his forepaw, whether out of curiosity or mischief, I could not tell;

but I drew my hanger, and gave him a good blow with the flat side of it; for I durst not strike him with the edge, fearing the inhabitants might be provoked against me, if they should come to know that I had killed or maimed any of their cattle. When the beast felt the smart, he drew back, and roared so loud, that a herd of at least forty came flocking about me from the near field, howling and making odious faces; but I ran to the body of a tree, and leaning my back against it, kept them off, by waving my hanger. Several of this cursed brood getting hold of the branches behind, leaped up into the tree, from whence they began to discharge their excrements on my head; however, I escaped pretty well, by sticking close to the stem of the tree, but was almost stifled with the filth, which fell about me on every side.

In the midst of this distress, I observed them all to run away on a sudden as fast as they could; at which I ventured to leave the tree, and pursue the road, wondering what it was that could put them into this fright. But looking on my left hand, I saw a horse walking softly in the field; which my persecutors having sooner discovered, was the cause of their flight. The horse started a little when he came near me, but soon recovering himself, looked full in my face with manifest tokens of wonder; he viewed my hands and feet, walking round me several times. I would have pursued my journey, but he placed himself directly in the way, yet looking with a very mild aspect, never offering the least violence. We stood gazing at each other for some time; at last I took the boldness, to reach my hand towards his neck, with a design to stroke it; using the common style and whistle of jockies when they are going to handle a strange horse. But this animal, seeming to receive my civilities with disdain, shook his head, and bent his brows, softly raising up his left forefoot to remove my hand. Then he neighed three or four times, but in so different a cadence, that I almost began to think he was speaking to himself in some language of his own.

While he and I were thus employed, another horse came up; who applying himself to the first in a very formal manner, they gently struck each other's right hoof before, neighing several times

by turns, and varying the sound, which seemed to be almost articulate. They went some paces off, as if it were to confer together, walking side by side, backward and forward, like persons deliberating upon some affair of weight; but often turning their eyes towards me, as it were to watch that I might not escape. I was amazed to see such actions and behavior in brute beasts; and concluded with myself that if the inhabitants of this country were endued with a proportionable degree of reason, they must needs be the wisest people upon earth. This thought gave me so much comfort, that I resolved to go forward until I could discover some house or village, or meet with any of the natives, leaving the two horses to discourse together as they pleased. But the first, who was a dapple grey, observing me to steal off, neighed after me in so expressive a tone that I fancied myself to understand what he meant; whereupon I turned back, and came near him, to expect his farther commands; but concealing my fear as much as I could; for I began to be in some pain, how this adventure might terminate; and the reader will easily believe I did not much like my present situation.

The two horses came up close to me, looking with great earnestness upon my face and hands. The grey steed rubbed my hat all round with his right fore hoof, and discomposed it so much that I was forced to adjust it better, by taking it off, and settling it again; whereat both he and his companion (who was a brown bay) appeared to be much surprised; the latter felt the lappet of my coat, and finding it to hang loose about me, they both looked with new signs of wonder. He stroked my right hand, seeming to admire the softness, and color; but he squeezed it so hard between his hoof and his pastern, that I was forced to roar; after which they both touched me with all possible tenderness. They were under great perplexity about my shoes and stockings, which they felt very often, neighing to each other, and using various gestures, not unlike those of a philosopher, when he would attempt to solve some new and difficult phenomenon.

Upon the whole, the behavior of these animals was so orderly and rational, so acute and judicious, that I at last concluded, they must needs be magicians, who had thus metamorphosed themselves upon some design; and seeing a stranger in the way, were resolved to divert themselves with him; or perhaps were really amazed at the sight of a man so very different in habit, feature, and complexion from those who might probably live in so remote a climate. Upon the strength of this reasoning, I ventured to address them in the following manner: "Gentlemen, if you be conjurers, as I have good cause to believe, you can understand any language; therefore I make bold to let your worships know that I am a poor distressed Englishman, driven by his misfortunes upon your coast; and I entreat one of you, to let me ride upon his back, as if he were a real horse, to some house or village, where I can be relieved. In return of which favor, I will make you a present of this knife and bracelet" (taking them out of my pocket). The two creatures stood silent while I spoke, seeming to listen with great attention; and when I had ended, they neighed frequently towards each other, as if they were engaged in serious conversation. I plainly observed, that their language expressed the passions very well, and the words might with little pains be resolved into an alphabet more easily than the Chinese.

I could frequently distinguish the word *Yahoo*,<sup>6</sup> which was repeated by each of them several times; and although it were impossible for me to conjecture what it meant, yet while the two horses were busy in conversation, I endeavored to practice this word upon my tongue; and as soon as they were silent, I boldly pronounced "Yahoo" in a loud voice, imitating, at the same time, as near as I could, the neighing of a horse; at which they were both visibly surprised, and the grey repeated the same word twice, as if he meant to teach me the right accent, wherein I spoke after him as well as I could, and found myself perceivably to improve every time, although very far from any degree of perfection. Then the bay tried me with a second word, much harder to be pronounced; but reducing it to the English orthography, may be spelt thus,

*Houyhnhnm*. I did not succeed in this so well as the former, but after two or three farther trials, I had better fortune; and they both appeared amazed at my capacity.

After some farther discourse, which I then conjectured might relate to me, the two friends took their leaves, with the same compliment of striking each other's hoof; and the grey made me signs that I should walk before him; wherein I thought it prudent to comply, till I could find a better director. When I offered to slacken my pace, he would cry, "Hhuun, Hhuun"; I guessed his meaning, and gave him to understand, as well as I could that I was weary, and not able to walk faster; upon which, he would stand a while to let me rest.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Campeche, in the Gulf of Mexico. Teneriffe is one of the Canary Islands.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "A distemper peculiar to sailors, in hot climates; wherein they imagine the sea to be green fields, and will throw themselves into it, if not restrained" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Perhaps compounded from two expressions of disgust, *yah* and *ugh* (or *hoo*), common in the 18th century.[Return to reference 6](#)



CHAPTER 2. *The Author conducted by a Houyhnhnm to his house. The house described. The Author's reception. The food of the Houyhnhnms. The Author in distress for want of meat is at last relieved. His manner of feeding in that country.*

Having traveled about three miles, we came to a long kind of building, made of timber, stuck in the ground, and wattled across; the roof was low, and covered with straw. I now began to be a little comforted, and took out some toys, which travelers usually carry for presents to the savage Indians of America and other parts, in hopes the people of the house would be thereby encouraged to receive me kindly. The horse made me a sign to go in first; it was a large room with a smooth clay floor, and a rack and manger extending the whole length on one side. There were three nags, and two mares, not eating, but some of them sitting down upon their hams, which I very much wondered at; but wondered more to see the rest employed in domestic business. The last seemed but ordinary cattle; however this confirmed my first opinion, that a people who could so far civilize brute animals must needs excel in wisdom all the nations of the world. The grey came in just after, and thereby prevented any ill treatment, which the others might have given me. He neighed to them several times in a style of authority, and received answers.

Beyond this room there were three others, reaching the length of the house, to which you passed through three doors, opposite to each other, in the manner of a vista; we went through the second room towards the third; here the grey walked in first, beckoning me to attend.<sup>7</sup> I waited in the second room, and got ready my presents, for the master and mistress of the house; they were two knives, three bracelets of false pearl, a small looking glass and a bead necklace. The horse neighed three or four times, and I waited to hear some answers in a human voice, but I heard no other returns than in the same dialect, only one or two a little shriller than his. I began to think that this house must belong to some person of great note among them, because there appeared so much ceremony before I could gain admittance. But, that a man of quality should be

served all by horses, was beyond my comprehension. I feared my brain was disturbed by my sufferings and misfortunes; I roused myself, and looked about me in the room where I was left alone; this was furnished as the first, only after a more elegant manner. I rubbed my eyes often, but the same objects still occurred. I pinched my arms and sides, to awaken myself, hoping I might be in a dream. I then absolutely concluded that all these appearances could be nothing else but necromancy and magic. But I had no time to pursue these reflections; for the grey horse came to the door, and made me a sign to follow him into the third room; where I saw a very comely mare, together with a colt and foal, sitting on their haunches, upon mats of straw, not unartfully made, and perfectly neat and clean.

The mare soon after my entrance, rose from her mat, and coming up close, after having nicely observed my hands and face, gave me a most contemptuous look; then turning to the horse, I heard the word *Yahoo* often repeated betwixt them; the meaning of which word I could not then comprehend, although it were the first I had learned to pronounce; but I was soon better informed, to my everlasting mortification: for the horse beckoning to me with his head, and repeating the word, "Hhuun, Hhuun," as he did upon the road, which I understood was to attend him, led me out into a kind of court, where was another building at some distance from the house. Here we entered, and I saw three of those detestable creatures, which I first met after my landing, feeding upon roots, and the flesh of some animals, which I afterwards found to be that of asses and dogs, and now and then a cow dead by accident or disease. They were all tied by the neck with strong withes,<sup>8</sup> fastened to a beam; they held their food between the claws of their forefeet, and tore it with their teeth.

The master horse ordered a sorrel nag, one of his servants, to untie the largest of these animals, and take him into a yard. The beast and I were brought close together; and our countenances diligently compared, both by master and servant, who thereupon repeated several times the word *Yahoo*. My horror and astonishment are not to be described, when I observed, in this abominable animal,

a perfect human figure; the face of it indeed was flat and broad, the nose depressed, the lips large, and the mouth wide; but these differences are common to all savage nations, where the lineaments of the countenance are distorted by the natives suffering their infants to lie groveling on the earth, or by carrying them on their backs, nuzzling with their face against the mother's shoulders. The forefeet of the Yahoo differed from my hands in nothing else but the length of the nails, the coarseness and brownness of the palms, and the hairiness on the backs. There was the same resemblance between our feet, with the same differences, which I knew very well, although the horses did not, because of my shoes and stockings; the same in every part of our bodies, except as to hairiness and color, which I have already described.

The great difficulty that seemed to stick with the two horses was to see the rest of my body so very different from that of a Yahoo, for which I was obliged to my clothes, whereof they had no conception; the sorrel nag offered me a root, which he held (after their manner, as we shall describe in its proper place) between his hoof and pastern; I took it in my hand, and having smelled it, returned it to him again as civilly as I could. He brought out of the Yahoo's kennel a piece of ass's flesh, but it smelled so offensively that I turned from it with loathing; he then threw it to the Yahoo, by whom it was greedily devoured. He afterwards showed me a wisp of hay, and a fetlock full of oats; but I shook my head, to signify that neither of these were food for me. And indeed, I now apprehended that I must absolutely starve, if I did not get to some of my own species; for as to those filthy Yahoos, although there were few greater lovers of mankind, at that time, than myself, yet I confess I never saw any sensitive being so detestable on all accounts; and the more I came near them, the more hateful they grew, while I stayed in that country. This the master horse observed by my behavior, and therefore sent the Yahoo back to his kennel. He then put his forehoof to his mouth, at which I was much surprised, although he did it with ease, and with a motion that appeared perfectly natural; and made other signs to know what I would eat; but I could not

return him such an answer as he was able to apprehend; and if he had understood me, I did not see how it was possible to contrive any way for finding myself nourishment. While we were thus engaged, I observed a cow passing by; whereupon I pointed to her, and expressed a desire to let me go and milk her. This had its effect; for he led me back into the house, and ordered a mare-servant to open a room, where a good store of milk lay in earthen and wooden vessels, after a very orderly and cleanly manner. She gave me a large bowl full, of which I drank very heartily, and found myself well refreshed.

About noon I saw coming towards the house a kind of vehicle, drawn like a sledge by four Yahoos. There was in it an old steed, who seemed to be of quality; he alighted with his hind feet forward, having by accident got a hurt in his left forefoot. He came to dine with our horse, who received him with great civility. They dined in the best room, and had oats boiled in milk for the second course, which the old horse eat warm, but the rest cold. Their mangers were placed circular in the middle of the room, and divided into several partitions, round which they sat on their haunches upon bosses<sup>9</sup> of straw. In the middle was a large rack with angles answering to every partition of the manger. So that each horse and mare eat their own hay, and their own mash of oats and milk, with much decency and regularity. The behavior of the young colt and foal appeared very modest; and that of the master and mistress extremely cheerful and complaisant to their guest. The grey ordered me to stand by him; and much discourse passed between him and his friend concerning me, as I found by the stranger's often looking on me, and the frequent repetition of the word *Yahoo*.

I happened to wear my gloves; which the master grey observing, seemed perplexed; discovering signs of wonder what I had done to my forefeet; he put his hoof three or four times to them, as if he would signify, that I should reduce them to their former shape, which I presently did, pulling off both my gloves, and putting them into my pocket. This occasioned farther talk, and I saw the company was pleased with my behavior, whereof I soon found the good

effects. I was ordered to speak the few words I understood; and while they were at dinner, the master taught me the names for oats, milk, fire, water, and some others which I could readily pronounce after him, having from my youth a great facility in learning languages.

When dinner was done, the master house took me aside, and by signs and words made me understand the concern he was in that I had nothing to eat. Oats in their tongue are called *hlunnh*. This word I pronounced two or three times; for although I had refused them at first, yet upon second thoughts, I considered that I could contrive to make a kind of bread, which might be sufficient with milk to keep me alive, till I could make my escape to some other country, and to creatures of my own species. The house immediately ordered a white mare-servant of his family to bring me a good quantity of oats in a sort of wooden tray. These I heated before the fire as well as I could, and rubbed them till the husks came off, which I made a shift to winnow from the grain; I ground and beat them between two stones, then took water, and made them into a paste or cake, which I toasted at the fire, and eat warm with milk. It was at first a very insipid diet, although common enough in many parts of Europe, but grew tolerable by time; and having been often reduced to hard fare in my life, this was not the first experiment I had made how easily nature is satisfied. And I cannot but observe that I never had one hour's sickness, while I staid in this island. It is true, I sometimes made a shift to catch a rabbit, or bird, by springes<sup>1</sup> made of Yahoos' hairs; and I often gathered wholesome herbs, which I boiled, or eat as salads with my bread; and now and then, for a rarity, I made a little butter, and drank the whey. I was at first at a great loss for salt; but custom soon reconciled the want of it; and I am confident that the frequent use of salt among us is an effect of luxury, and was first introduced only as a provocative to drink; except where it is necessary for preserving of flesh in long voyages, or in places remote from great markets. For we observe no animal to be fond of it but man;<sup>2</sup> and as to myself, when I left this country, it was a great while before I could endure the taste of it in anything that I eat.

This is enough to say upon the subject of my diet, wherewith other travelers fill their books, as if the readers were personally concerned whether we fare well or ill. However, it was necessary to mention this matter, lest the world should think it impossible that I could find sustenance for three years in such a country, and among such inhabitants.

When it grew towards evening, the master horse ordered a place for me to lodge in; it was but six yards from the house, and separated from the stable of the Yahoos. Here I got some straw, and covering myself with my own clothes, slept very sound. But I was in a short time better accommodated, as the reader shall know hereafter, when I come to treat more particularly about my way of living.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: To wait. "Vista": a long, open corridor.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Slender, flexible branches.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Seats of bundled grasses.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Snares.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Gulliver is, of course, in error; many animals require salt.[Return to reference 2](#)

CHAPTER 3. *The Author studious to learn the language, the Houyhnhnm his master assists in teaching him. The language described. Several Houyhnhnms of quality come out of curiosity to see the Author. He gives his master a short account of his voyage.*

My principal endeavor was to learn the language, which my master (for so I shall henceforth call him) and his children, and every servant of his house were desirous to teach me. For they looked upon it as a prodigy, that a brute animal should discover such marks of a rational creature. I pointed to everything, and enquired the name of it, which I wrote down in my journal book when I was alone, and corrected my bad accent, by desiring those of the family to pronounce it often. In this employment, a sorrel nag, one of the under servants, was very ready to assist me.

In speaking, they pronounce through the nose and throat, and their language approaches nearest to the High Dutch or German, of any I know in Europe; but is much more graceful and significant. The Emperor Charles V made almost the same observation, when he said, that if he were to speak to his horse, it should be in High Dutch.<sup>3</sup>

The curiosity and impatience of my master were so great, that he spent many hours of his leisure to instruct me. He was convinced (as he afterwards told me) that I must be a Yahoo, but my teachableness, civility, and cleanliness astonished him; which were qualities altogether so opposite to those animals. He was most perplexed about my clothes, reasoning sometimes with himself whether they were a part of my body; for I never pulled them off till the family were asleep, and got them on before they waked in the morning. My master was eager to learn from whence I came; how I acquired those appearances of reason, which I discovered in all my actions; and to know my story from my own mouth, which he hoped he should soon do by the great proficiency I made in learning and pronouncing their words and sentences. To help my memory, I formed all I learned into the English alphabet, and writ the words down with the translations. This last, after some time, I ventured to

do in my master's presence. It cost me much trouble to explain to him what I was doing; for the inhabitants have not the least idea of books or literature.

In about ten weeks time I was able to understand most of his questions; and in three months could give him some tolerable answers. He was extremely curious to know from what part of the country I came, and how I was taught to imitate a rational creature; because the Yahoos (whom he saw I exactly resembled in my head, hands, and face, that were only visible) with some appearance of cunning, and the strongest disposition to mischief, were observed to be the most unteachable of all brutes. I answered that I came over the sea, from a far place, with many others of my own kind, in a great hollow vessel made of the bodies of trees; that my companions forced me to land on this coast, and then left me to shift for myself. It was with some difficulty, and by the help of many signs, that I brought him to understand me. He replied that I must needs be mistaken, or that I *said the thing which was not*. (For they have no word in their language to express lying or falsehood.) He knew it was impossible that there could be a country beyond the sea, or that a parcel of brutes could move a wooden vessel whither they pleased upon water. He was sure no Houyhnhnm alive could make such a vessel, or would trust Yahoos to manage it.

The word Houyhnhnm, in their tongue, signifies a Horse; and in its etymology, the Perfection of Nature. I told my master that I was at a loss for expression, but would improve as fast as I could; and hoped in a short time I should be able to tell him wonders. He was pleased to direct his own mare, his colt, and foal, and the servants of the family to take all opportunities of instructing me; and every day for two or three hours, he was at the same pains himself. Several horses and mares of quality in the neighborhood came often to our house, upon the report spread of a wonderful Yahoo, that could speak like a Houyhnhnm, and seemed in his words and actions to discover some glimmerings of reason. These delighted to converse with me; they put many questions, and received such answers as I was able to return. By all which advantages, I made so



great a progress, that in five months from my arrival, I understood whatever was spoke, and could express myself tolerably well.

The Houyhnhnms who came to visit my master, out of a design of seeing and talking with me, could hardly believe me to be a right Yahoo, because my body had a different covering from others of my kind. They were astonished to observe me without the usual hair or skin, except on my head, face, and hands; but I discovered that secret to my master, upon an accident, which happened about a fortnight before.

I have already told the reader, that every night when the family were gone to bed, it was my custom to strip and cover myself with my clothes; it happened one morning early, that my master sent for me, by the sorrel nag, who was his valet; when he came, I was fast asleep, my clothes fallen off on one side, and my shirt above my waist. I awaked at the noise he made, and observed him to deliver his message in some disorder; after which he went to my master, and in a great fright gave him a very confused account of what he had seen. This I presently discovered; for going as soon as I was dressed, to pay my attendance upon his honor, he asked me the meaning of what his servant had reported; that I was not the same thing when I slept as I appeared to be at other times; that his valet assured him, some part of me was white, some yellow, at least not so white, and some brown.

I had hitherto concealed the secret of my dress, in order to distinguish myself as much as possible, from that cursed race of Yahoos; but now I found it in vain to do so any longer. Besides, I considered that my clothes and shoes would soon wear out, which already were in a declining condition, and must be supplied by some contrivance from the hides of Yahoos, or other brutes; whereby the whole secret would be known. I therefore told my master, that in the country from whence I came, those of my kind always covered their bodies with the hairs of certain animals prepared by art, as well for decency, as to avoid inclemencies of air both hot and cold; of which, as to my own person I would give him immediate conviction, if he pleased to command me; only desiring his excuse, if I did not

expose those parts that Nature taught us to conceal. He said, my discourse was all very strange, but especially the last part; for he could not understand why Nature should teach us to conceal what Nature had given. That neither himself nor family were ashamed of any parts of their bodies; but however I might do as I pleased. Whereupon, I first unbuttoned my coat, and pulled it off. I did the same with my waistcoat; I drew off my shoes, stockings, and breeches. I let my shirt down to my waist, and drew up the bottom, fastening it like a girdle about my middle to hide my nakedness.

My master observed the whole performance with great signs of curiosity and admiration. He took up all my clothes in his pastern, one piece after another, and examined them diligently; he then stroked my body very gently, and looked round me several times; after which he said, it was plain I must be a perfect Yahoo; but that I differed very much from the rest of my species, in the whiteness and smoothness of my skin, my want of hair in several parts of my body, the shape and shortness of my claws behind and before, and my affectation of walking continually on my two hinder feet. He desired to see no more; and gave me leave to put on my clothes again, for I was shuddering with cold.

I expressed my uneasiness at his giving me so often the appellation of Yahoo, an odious animal, for which I had so utter an hatred and contempt. I begged he would forbear applying that word to me, and take the same order in his family, and among his friends whom he suffered to see me. I requested likewise, that the secret of my having a false covering to my body might be known to none but himself, at least as long as my present clothing should last; for as to what the sorrel nag his valet had observed, his honor might command him to conceal it.

All this my master very graciously consented to; and thus the secret was kept till my clothes began to wear out, which I was forced to supply by several contrivances, that shall hereafter be mentioned. In the meantime, he desired I would go on with my utmost diligence to learn their language, because he was more astonished at my capacity for speech and reason, than at the figure

of my body, whether it were covered or no; adding that he waited with some impatience to hear the wonders which I promised to tell him.

From thenceforward he doubled the pains he had been at to instruct me; he brought me into all company, and made them treat me with civility, because, as he told them privately, this would put me into good humor, and make me more diverting.

Every day when I waited on him, beside the trouble he was at in teaching, he would ask me several questions concerning myself, which I answered as well as I could; and by those means he had already received some general ideas, although very imperfect. It would be tedious to relate the several steps, by which I advanced to a more regular conversation, but the first account I gave of myself in any order and length was to this purpose:

That, I came from a very far country, as I already had attempted to tell him, with about fifty more of my own species; that we traveled upon the seas, in a great hollow vessel made of wood, and larger than his honor's house. I described the ship to him in the best terms I could; and explained by the help of my handkerchief displayed, how it was driven forward by the wind. That, upon a quarrel among us, I was set on shore on this coast, where I walked forward without knowing whither, till he delivered me from the persecution of those execrable Yahoos. He asked me who made the ship, and how it was possible that the Houyhnhnms of my country would leave it to the management of brutes? My answer was that I durst proceed no farther in my relation, unless he would give me his word and honor that he would not be offended; and then I would tell him the wonders I had so often promised. He agreed; and I went on by assuring him, that the ship was made by creatures like myself, who in all the countries I had traveled, as well as in my own, were the only governing, rational animals; and that upon my arrival hither, I was as much astonished to see the Houyhnhnms act like rational beings, as he or his friends could be in finding some marks of reason in a creature he was pleased to call a Yahoo; to which I owned my resemblance in every part, but could not account for their

degenerate and brutal nature. I said farther, that if good fortune ever restored me to my native country, to relate my travels hither, as I resolved to do, everybody would believe that I *said the thing which was not*, that I invented the story out of my own head; and with all possible respect to himself, his family, and friends, and under his promise of not being offended, our countrymen would hardly think it probable, that a Houyhnhnm should be the presiding creature of a nation, and a Yahoo the brute.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: The emperor is supposed to have said that he would speak to his God in Spanish, to his mistress in Italian, and to his horse in German. [Return to reference 3](#)

CHAPTER 4. *The Houyhnhnms' notion of truth and falsehood. The Author's discourse disapproved by his master. The Author gives a more particular account of himself, and the accidents of his voyage.*

My master heard me with great appearances of uneasiness in his countenance; because *doubting* or *not believing* are so little known in this country, that the inhabitants cannot tell how to behave themselves under such circumstances. And I remember in frequent discourses with my master concerning the nature of manhood, in other parts of the world, having occasion to talk of *lying* and *false representation*, it was with much difficulty that he comprehended what I meant; although he had otherwise a most acute judgment. For he argued thus: that the use of speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive information of facts; now if anyone *said the thing which was not*, these ends were defeated; because I cannot properly be said to understand him; and I am so far from receiving information, that he leaves me worse than in ignorance; for I am led to believe a thing *black* when it is *white*, and *short* when it is *long*. And these were all the notions he had concerning the faculty of *lying*, so perfectly well understood, and so universally practiced among human creatures.

To return from this digression; when I asserted that the Yahoos were the only governing animals in my country, which my master said was altogether past his conception, he desired to know, whether we had Houyhnhnms among us, and what was their employment. I told him we had great numbers; that in summer they grazed in the fields, and in winter were kept in houses, with hay and oats, where Yahoo servants were employed to rub their skins smooth, comb their manes, pick their feet, serve them with food, and make their beds. "I understand you well," said my master; "it is now very plain from all you have spoken, that whatever share of reason the Yahoos pretend to, the Houyhnhnms are your masters; I heartily wish our Yahoos would be so tractable." I begged his honor would please to excuse me from proceeding any farther, because I was very certain that the account he expected from me would be highly displeasing. But he insisted in commanding me to let him

know the best and the worst; I told him he should be obeyed. I owned that the Houyhnhnms among us, whom we called Horses, were the most generous<sup>4</sup> and comely animal we had; that they excelled in strength and swiftness; and when they belonged to persons of quality, employed in traveling, racing, and drawing chariots, they were treated with much kindness and care, till they fell into diseases, or became foundered in the feet; but then they were sold, and used to all kind of drudgery till they died; after which their skins were stripped and sold for what they were worth, and their bodies left to be devoured by dogs and birds of prey. But the common race of horses had not so good fortune, being kept by farmers and carriers, and other mean people, who put them to greater labor, and feed them worse. I described as well as I could, our way of riding; the shape and use of a bridle, a saddle, a spur, and a whip; of harness and wheels. I added, that we fastened plates of a certain hard substance called iron at the bottom of their feet, to preserve their hoofs from being broken by the stony ways on which we often traveled.

My master, after some expressions of great indignation, wondered how we dared to venture upon a Houyhnhnm's back; for he was sure, that the weakest servant in his house would be able to shake off the strongest Yahoo; or by lying down, and rolling upon his back, squeeze the brute to death. I answered that our horses were trained up from three or four years old to the several uses we intended them for; that if any of them proved intolerably vicious, they were employed for carriages; that they were severely beaten while they were young for any mischievous tricks; that the males, designed for the common use of riding or draught, were generally castrated about two years after their birth, to take down their spirits, and make them more tame and gentle; that they were indeed sensible of rewards and punishments; but his honor would please to consider that they had not the least tincture of reason any more than the Yahoos in this country.

It put me to the pains of many circumlocutions to give my master a right idea of what I spoke; for their language doth not abound in

variety of words, because their wants and passions are fewer than among us. But it is impossible to express his noble resentment at our savage treatment of the Houyhnhnm race; particularly after I had explained the manner and use of castrating horses among us, to hinder them from propagating their kind, and to render them more servile. He said, if it were possible there could be any country where Yahoos alone were endued with reason, they certainly must be the governing animal, because reason will in time always prevail against brutal strength. But, considering the frame of our bodies, and especially of mine, he thought no creature of equal bulk was so ill-contrived for employing that reason in the common offices of life; whereupon he desired to know whether those among whom I lived resembled me or the Yahoos of his country. I assured him that I was as well shaped as most of my age; but the younger and the females were much more soft and tender, and the skins of the latter generally as white as milk. He said I differed indeed from other Yahoos, being much more cleanly, and not altogether so deformed; but in point of real advantage, he thought I differed for the worse. That my nails were of no use either to my fore or hinder feet; as to my forefeet, he could not properly call them by that name, for he never observed me to walk upon them; that they were too soft to bear the ground; that I generally went with them uncovered, neither was the covering I sometimes wore on them of the same shape, or so strong as that on my feet behind. That I could not walk with any security; for if either of my hinder feet slipped, I must inevitably fall. He then began to find fault with other parts of my body; the flatness of my face, the prominence of my nose, my eyes placed directly in front, so that I could not look on either side without turning my head; that I was not able to feed myself without lifting one of my forefeet to my mouth; and therefore nature had placed those joints to answer that necessity. He knew not what could be the use of those several clefts and divisions in my feet behind; that these were too soft to bear the hardness and sharpness of stones without a covering made from the skin of some other brute; that my whole body wanted a fence against heat and cold, which I was forced to put on and off every day with tediousness and trouble. And lastly,

that he observed every animal in his country naturally to abhor the Yahoos, whom the weaker avoided, and the stronger drove from them. So that supposing us to have the gift of reason, he could not see how it were possible to cure that natural antipathy which every creature discovered against us; nor consequently, how we could tame and render them serviceable. However, he would (as he said) debate the matter no farther, because he was more desirous to know my own story, the country where I was born, and the several actions and events of my life before I came hither.

I assured him how extremely desirous I was that he should be satisfied in every point; but I doubted much whether it would be possible for me to explain myself on several subjects whereof his honor could have no conception, because I saw nothing in his country to which I could resemble them. That however, I would do my best, and strive to express myself by similitudes, humbly desiring his assistance when I wanted proper words; which he was pleased to promise me.

I said, my birth was of honest parents, in an island called England, which was remote from this country, as many days journey as the strongest of his honor's servants could travel in the annual course of the sun. That I was bred a surgeon, whose trade it is to cure wounds and hurts in the body, got by accident or violence. That my country was governed by a female man, whom we called a queen. That I left it to get riches, whereby I might maintain myself and family when I should return. That in my last voyage, I was Commander of the ship and had about fifty Yahoos under me, many of which died at sea, and I was forced to supply them by others picked out from several nations. That our ship was twice in danger of being sunk; the first time by a great storm, and the second, by striking against a rock. Here my master interposed, by asking me, how I could persuade strangers out of different countries to venture with me, after the losses I had sustained, and the hazards I had run. I said, they were fellows of desperate fortunes, forced to fly from the places of their birth, on account of their poverty or their crimes. Some were undone by lawsuits; others spent all they had in



drinking, whoring, and gaming; others fled for treason; many for murder, theft, poisoning, robbery, perjury, forgery, coining false money; for committing rapes or sodomy; for flying from their colors, or deserting to the enemy; and most of them had broken prison. None of these durst return to their native countries for fear of being hanged, or of starving in a jail; and therefore were under a necessity of seeking a livelihood in other places.

During this discourse, my master was pleased often to interrupt me. I had made use of many circumlocutions in describing to him the nature of the several crimes, for which most of our crew had been forced to fly their country. This labor took up several days conversation before he was able to comprehend me. He was wholly at a loss to know what could be the use or necessity of practicing those vices. To clear up which I endeavored to give him some ideas of the desire of power and riches; of the terrible effects of lust, intemperance, malice, and envy. All this I was forced to define and describe by putting of cases, and making suppositions. After which, like one whose imagination was struck with something never seen or heard of before, he would lift up his eyes with amazement and indignation. Power, government, war, law, punishment, and a thousand other things had no terms, wherein that language could express them; which made the difficulty almost insuperable to give my master any conception of what I meant; but being of an excellent understanding, much improved by contemplation and converse, he at last arrived at a competent knowledge of what human nature in our parts of the world is capable to perform; and desired I would give him some particular account of that land, which we call Europe, especially, of my own country.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Noble.[Return to reference 4](#)

CHAPTER 5. *The Author, at his master's commands, informs him of the state of England. The causes of war among the princes of Europe. The Author begins to explain the English Constitution.*

The reader may please to observe that the following extract of many conversations I had with my master contains a summary of the most material points, which were discoursed at several times for above two years; his honor often desiring fuller satisfaction as I farther improved in the Houyhnhnm tongue. I laid before him, as well as I could, the whole state of Europe; I discoursed of trade and manufactures, of arts and sciences; and the answers I gave to all the questions he made, as they arose upon several subjects, were a fund of conversation not to be exhausted. But I shall here only set down the substance of what passed between us concerning my own country, reducing it into order as well as I can, without any regard to time or other circumstances, while I strictly adhere to truth. My only concern is that I shall hardly be able to do justice to my master's arguments and expressions; which must needs suffer by my want of capacity, as well as by a translation into our barbarous English.

In obedience therefore to his honor's commands, I related to him the Revolution under the Prince of Orange; the long war with France entered into by the said Prince, and renewed by his successor the present queen; wherein the greatest powers of Christendom were engaged, and which still continued. I computed at his request, that about a million of Yahoos might have been killed in the whole progress of it; and perhaps a hundred or more cities taken, and five times as many ships burned or sunk.<sup>5</sup>

He asked me what were the usual causes or motives that made one country to go to war with another. I answered, they were innumerable; but I should only mention a few of the chief. Sometimes the ambition of princes, who never think they have land or people enough to govern; sometimes the corruption of ministers, who engage their master in a war in order to stifle or divert the clamor of the subjects against their evil administration. Difference in opinions hath cost many millions of lives; for instance, whether flesh

be bread, or bread be flesh; whether the juice of a certain berry be blood or wine; whether whistling be a vice or a virtue; whether it be better to kiss a post, or throw it into the fire; what is the best color for a coat, whether black, white, red, or grey; and whether it should be long or short, narrow or wide, dirty or clean;<sup>6</sup> with many more. Neither are any wars so furious and bloody, or of so long continuance, as those occasioned by difference in opinion, especially if it be in things indifferent.<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes the quarrel between two princes is to decide which of them shall dispossess a third of his dominions, where neither of them pretend to any right. Sometimes one prince quarreleth with another, for fear the other should quarrel with him. Sometimes a war is entered upon, because the enemy is too strong, and sometimes because he is too weak. Sometimes our neighbors want the things which we have, or have the things which we want; and we both fight, till they take ours or give us theirs. It is a very justifiable cause of war to invade a country after the people have been wasted by famine, destroyed by pestilence, or embroiled by factions amongst themselves. It is justifiable to enter into a war against our nearest ally, when one of his towns lies convenient for us, or a territory of land, that would render our dominions round and compact. If a prince send forces into a nation, where the people are poor and ignorant, he may lawfully put half of them to death, and make slaves of the rest, in order to civilize and reduce them from their barbarous way of living. It is a very kingly, honorable, and frequent practice, when one prince desires the assistance of another to secure him against an invasion, that the assistant, when he hath driven out the invader, should seize on the dominions himself, and kill, imprison, or banish the prince he came to relieve. Alliance by blood or marriage is a sufficient cause of war between princes; and the nearer the kindred is, the greater is their disposition to quarrel. Poor nations are hungry, and rich nations are proud; and pride and hunger will ever be at variance. For these reasons, the trade of a soldier is held the most honorable of all others: because a soldier is a Yahoo hired to

kill in cold blood as many of his own species, who have never offended him, as possibly he can.

There is likewise a kind of beggarly princes in Europe, not able to make war by themselves, who hire out their troops to richer nations for so much a day to each man; of which they keep three fourths to themselves, and it is the best part of their maintenance; such are those in many northern parts of Europe.<sup>8</sup>

“What you have told me,” said my master, “upon the subject of war, doth indeed discover most admirably the effects of that reason you pretend to. However, it is happy that the shame is greater than the danger; and that Nature hath left you utterly incapable of doing much mischief; for your mouths lying flat with your faces, you can hardly bite each other to any purpose, unless by consent. Then, as to the claws upon your feet before and behind, they are so short and tender, that one of our Yahoos would drive a dozen of yours before him. And therefore in recounting the numbers of those who have been killed in battle, I cannot but think that you have *said the thing which is not.*”

I could not forbear shaking my head and smiling a little at his ignorance. And, being no stranger to the art of war, I gave him a description of cannons, culverins, muskets, carabines, pistols, bullets, powder, swords, bayonets, battles, sieges, retreats, attacks, undermines, countermines, bombardments, sea fights; ships sunk with a thousand men; twenty thousand killed on each side; dying groans, limbs flying in the air; smoke, noise, confusion, trampling to death under horses’ feet; flight, pursuit, victory; fields strewed with carcasses left for food to dogs, and wolves, and birds of prey; plundering, stripping, ravishing, burning, and destroying. And, to set forth the valor of my own dear countrymen, I assured him that I had seen them blow up a hundred enemies at once in a siege, and as many in a ship; and beheld the dead bodies drop down in pieces from the clouds, to the great diversion of all the spectators.

I was going on to more particulars, when my master commanded me silence. He said, whoever understood the nature of Yahoos might easily believe it possible for so vile an animal, to be capable of every

action I had named, if their strength and cunning equaled their malice. But, as my discourse had increased his abhorrence of the whole species, so he found it gave him a disturbance in his mind, to which he was wholly a stranger before. He thought his ears being used to such abominable words, might by degrees admit them with less detestation. That, although he hated the Yahoos of this country, yet he no more blamed them for their odious qualities, than he did a *gnnayh* (a bird of prey) for its cruelty, or a sharp stone for cutting his hoof. But, when a creature pretending to reason could be capable of such enormities, he dreaded lest the corruption of that faculty might be worse than brutality itself. He seemed therefore confident, that instead of reason, we were only possessed of some quality fitted to increase our natural vices; as the reflection from a troubled stream returns the image of an ill-shapen body, not only larger, but more distorted.

He added that he had heard too much upon the subject of war, both in this and some former discourses. There was another point which a little perplexed him at present. I had said that some of our crew left their country on account of being ruined by law: that I had already explained the meaning of the word; but he was at a loss how it should come to pass, that the law which was intended for every man's preservation, should be any man's ruin. Therefore he desired to be farther satisfied what I meant by law, and the dispensers thereof, according to the present practice in my own country; because he thought Nature and Reason were sufficient guides for a reasonable animal, as we pretended to be, in showing us what we ought to do, and what to avoid.

I assured his honor that law was a science wherein I had not much conversed, further than by employing advocates, in vain, upon some injustices that had been done me. However, I would give him all the satisfaction I was able.

I said there was a society of men among us, bred up from their youth in the art of proving by words multiplied for the purpose, that white is black, and black is white, according as they are paid. To this society all the rest of the people are slaves.

"For example. If my neighbor hath a mind to my cow, he hires a lawyer to prove that he ought to have my cow from me. I must then hire another to defend my right; it being against all rules of law that any man should be allowed to speak for himself. Now in this case, I who am the true owner lie under two great disadvantages. First, my lawyer being practiced almost from his cradle in defending falsehood is quite out of his element when he would be an advocate for justice, which as an office unnatural, he always attempts with great awkwardness, if not with ill-will. The second disadvantage is that my lawyer must proceed with great caution, or else he will be reprimanded by the judges, and abhorred by his brethren, as one who would lessen the practice of the law. And therefore I have but two methods to preserve my cow. The first is to gain over my adversary's lawyer with a double fee; who will then betray his client, by insinuating that he hath justice on his side. The second way is for my lawyer to make my cause appear as unjust as he can; by allowing the cow to belong to my adversary; and this if it be skillfully done, will certainly bespeak the favor of the bench.

"Now, your honor is to know that these judges are persons appointed to decide all controversies of property, as well as for the trial of criminals; and picked out from the most dextrous lawyers who are grown old or lazy; and having been biased all their lives against truth and equity, lie under such a fatal necessity of favoring fraud, perjury, and oppression, that I have known some of them to have refused a large bribe from the side where justice lay, rather than injure the faculty,<sup>9</sup> by doing anything unbecoming their nature or their office.

"It is a maxim among these lawyers, that whatever hath been done before may legally be done again; and therefore they take special care to record all the decisions formerly made against common justice and the general reason of mankind. These, under the name of *precedents*, they produce as authorities to justify the most iniquitous opinions; and the judges never fail of directing accordingly.

"In pleading, they studiously avoid entering into the merits of the cause; but are loud, violent, and tedious in dwelling upon all circumstances which are not to the purpose. For instance, in the case already mentioned, they never desire to know what claim or title my adversary hath to my cow; but whether the said cow were red or black; her horns long or short; whether the field I graze her in be round or square; whether she were milked at home or abroad; what diseases she is subject to, and the like. After which they consult precedents, adjourn the cause, from time to time, and in ten, twenty, or thirty years come to an issue.

"It is likewise to be observed, that this society hath a peculiar cant and jargon of their own, that no other mortal can understand, and wherein all their laws are written, which they take special care to multiply; whereby they have wholly confounded the very essence of truth and falsehood, of right and wrong; so that it will take thirty years to decide whether the field, left me by my ancestors for six generations, belong to me, or to a stranger three hundred miles off.

"In the trial of persons accused for crimes against the state, the method is much more short and commendable: the judge first sends to sound the disposition of those in power; after which he can easily hang or save the criminal, strictly preserving all the forms of law."

Here my master interposing said it was a pity that creatures endowed with such prodigious abilities of mind as these lawyers, by the description I gave of them, must certainly be, were not rather encouraged to be instructors of others in wisdom and knowledge. In answer to which, I assured his honor that in all points out of their own trade, they were usually the most ignorant and stupid generation among us, the most despicable in common conversation, avowed enemies to all knowledge and learning; and equally disposed to pervert the general reason of mankind, in every other subject of discourse as in that of their own profession.

## **Endnotes**

- Note 5: Gulliver relates recent English history: the Glorious Revolution (1688–89) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13). He greatly exaggerates the casualties in the war.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Gulliver refers to the religious controversies of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation: the doctrine of transubstantiation, the use of music in church services, the veneration of the crucifix, and the wearing of priestly vestments.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Of little consequence.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A satiric glance at George I, who, as elector of Hanover, had dealt in this trade.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Profession.[Return to reference 9](#)



CHAPTER 6. *A continuation of the state of England, under Queen Anne. The character of a first minister in the courts of Europe.*

My master was yet wholly at a loss to understand what motives could incite this race of lawyers to perplex, disquiet, and weary themselves by engaging in a confederacy of injustice, merely for the sake of injuring their fellow animals; neither could he comprehend what I meant in saying they did it for hire. Whereupon I was at much pains to describe to him the use of money, the materials it was made of, and the value of the metals; that when a Yahoo had got a great store of this precious substance, he was able to purchase whatever he had a mind to; the finest clothing, the noblest houses, great tracts of land, the most costly meats and drinks; and have his choice of the most beautiful females. Therefore since money alone was able to perform all these feats, our Yahoos thought they could never have enough of it to spend or to save, as they found themselves inclined from their natural bent either to profusion or avarice. That the rich man enjoyed the fruit of the poor man's labor, and the latter were a thousand to one in proportion to the former. That the bulk of our people was forced to live miserably, by laboring every day for small wages to make a few live plentifully. I enlarged myself much on these and many other particulars to the same purpose, but his honor was still to seek,<sup>1</sup> for he went upon a supposition that all animals had a title to their share in the productions of the earth; and especially those who presided over the rest. Therefore he desired I would let him know what these costly meats were, and how any of us happened to want them. Whereupon I enumerated as many sorts as came into my head, with the various methods of dressing them, which could not be done without sending vessels by sea to every part of the world, as well for liquors to drink, as for sauces, and innumerable other conveniencies. I assured him, that this whole globe of earth must be at least three times gone round, before one of our better female Yahoos could get her breakfast, or a cup to put it in. He said, "That must needs be a miserable country which cannot furnish food for its own inhabitants."

But what he chiefly wondered at, was how such vast tracts of ground as I described, should be wholly without fresh water, and the people put to the necessity of sending over the sea for drink. I replied that England (the dear place of my nativity) was computed to produce three times the quantity of food, more than its inhabitants are able to consume, as well as liquors extracted from grain, or pressed out of the fruit of certain trees, which made excellent drink; and the same proportion in every other convenience of life. But, in order to feed the luxury and intemperance of the males, and the vanity of the females, we sent away the greatest part of our necessary things to other countries, from whence in return we brought the materials of diseases, folly, and vice, to spend among ourselves. Hence it follows of necessity, that vast numbers of our people are compelled to seek their livelihood by begging, robbing, stealing, cheating, pimping, forswearing, flattering, suborning, forging, gaming, lying, fawning, hectoring, voting, scribbling, star gazing, poisoning, whoring, canting, libeling, freethinking, and the like occupations; every one of which terms, I was at much pains to make him understand.

That, wine was not imported among us from foreign countries, to supply the want of water or other drinks, but because it was a sort of liquid which made us merry, by putting us out of our senses; diverted all melancholy thoughts, begat wild extravagant imaginations in the brain, raised our hopes, and banished our fears; suspended every office of reason for a time, and deprived us of the use of our limbs, until we fell into a profound sleep; although it must be confessed, that we always awaked sick and dispirited; and that the use of this liquor filled us with diseases, which made our lives uncomfortable and short.

But beside all this, the bulk of our people supported themselves by furnishing the necessities or conveniencies of life to the rich, and to each other. For instance, when I am at home and dressed as I ought to be, I carry on my body the workmanship of an hundred tradesmen; the building and furniture of my house employ as many more; and five times the number to adorn my wife.

I was going on to tell him of another sort of people, who get their livelihood by attending the sick; having upon some occasions informed his honor that many of my crew had died of diseases. But here it was with the utmost difficulty that I brought him to apprehend what I meant. He could easily conceive that a Houyhnhnm grew weak and heavy a few days before his death; or by some accident might hurt a limb. But that nature, who worketh all things to perfection, should suffer any pains to breed in our bodies, he thought impossible; and desired to know the reason of so unaccountable an evil. I told him, we fed on a thousand things which operated contrary to each other; that we eat when we were not hungry, and drank without the provocation of thirst; that we sat whole nights drinking strong liquors without eating a bit, which disposed us to sloth, inflamed our bodies, and precipitated or prevented digestion. That, prostitute female Yahoos acquired a certain malady, which bred rottenness in the bones of those who fell into their embraces; that this and many other diseases were propagated from father to son; so that great numbers come into the world with complicated maladies upon them; that it would be endless to give him a catalogue of all diseases incident to human bodies; for they could not be fewer than five or six hundred, spread over every limb, and joint; in short, every part, external and intestine, having diseases appropriated to each. To remedy which, there was a sort of people bred up among us, in the profession or pretense of curing the sick. And because I had some skill in the faculty, I would in gratitude to his honor let him know the whole mystery and method by which they proceed.

Their fundamental is that all diseases arise from repletion; from whence they conclude, that a great evacuation of the body is necessary, either through the natural passage, or upwards at the mouth. Their next business is, from herbs, minerals, gums, oils, shells, salts, juices, seaweed, excrements, barks of trees, serpents, toads, frogs, spiders, dead men's flesh and bones, birds, beasts and fishes, to form a composition for smell and taste the most abominable, nauseous, and detestable, that they can possibly

contrive, which the stomach immediately rejects with loathing, and this they call a vomit. Or else from the same storehouse, with some other poisonous additions, they command us to take in at the orifice above or below ( just as the physician then happens to be disposed) a medicine equally annoying and disgusting to the bowels; which relaxing the belly, drives down all before it; and this they call a purge, or a clyster. For nature (as the physicians allege) having intended the superior anterior orifice only for the intromission of solids and liquids, and the inferior posterior for ejection, these artists ingeniously considering that in all diseases nature is forced out of her seat; therefore to replace her in it, the body must be treated in a manner directly contrary, by interchanging the use of each orifice; forcing solids and liquids in at the anus, and making evacuations at the mouth.

But, besides real diseases, we are subject to many that are only imaginary, for which the physicians have invented imaginary cures; these have their several names, and so have the drugs that are proper for them; and with these our female Yahoos are always infested.

One great excellency in this tribe is their skill at prognostics, wherein they seldom fail; their predictions in real diseases, when they rise to any degree of malignity, generally portending death, which is always in their power, when recovery is not, and therefore, upon any unexpected signs of amendment, after they have pronounced their sentence, rather than be accused as false prophets, they know how to approve<sup>2</sup> their sagacity to the world by a seasonable dose.

They are likewise of special use to husbands and wives, who are grown weary of their mates; to eldest sons, to great ministers of state, and often to princes.

I had formerly upon occasion discoursed with my master upon the nature of government in general, and particularly of our own excellent constitution, deservedly the wonder and envy of the whole world. But having here accidentally mentioned a minister of state, he

commanded me some time after to inform him what species of Yahoo I particularly meant by that appellation.

I told him that a first or chief minister of state, whom I intended to describe, was a creature wholly exempt from joy and grief, love and hatred, pity and anger; at least makes use of no other passions but a violent desire of wealth, power, and titles; that he applies his words to all uses, except to the indication of his mind; that he never tells a truth, but with an intent that you should take it for a lie; nor a lie, but with a design that you should take it for a truth; that those he speaks worst of behind their backs are in the surest way to preferment; and whenever he begins to praise you to others or to yourself, you are from that day forlorn. The worst mark you can receive is a promise, especially when it is confirmed with an oath; after which every wise man retires, and gives over all hopes.

There are three methods by which a man may rise to be chief minister: the first is by knowing how with prudence to dispose of a wife, a daughter, or a sister; the second, by betraying or undermining his predecessor; and the third is by a furious zeal in public assemblies against the corruptions of the court. But a wise prince would rather choose to employ those who practice the last of these methods; because such zealots prove always the most obsequious and subservient to the will and passions of their master. That, these ministers having all employments at their disposal, preserve themselves in power by bribing the majority of a senate or great council; and at last by an expedient called an Act of Indemnity<sup>3</sup> (whereof I described the nature to him) they secure themselves from after reckonings, and retire from the public, laden with the spoils of the nation.

The palace of a chief minister is a seminary to breed up others in his own trade; the pages, lackies, and porter, by imitating their master, become ministers of state in their several districts, and learn to excel in the three principal ingredients, of insolence, lying, and bribery. Accordingly, they have a subaltern court paid to them by persons of the best rank; and sometimes by the force of dexterity

and impudence, arrive through several gradations to be successors to their lord.

He is usually governed by a decayed wench, or favorite footman, who are the tunnels through which all graces are conveyed, and may properly be called, in the last resort, the governors of the kingdom.

One day, my master, having heard me mention the nobility of my country, was pleased to make me a compliment which I could not pretend to deserve: that, he was sure, I must have been born of some noble family, because I far exceeded in shape, color, and cleanliness, all the Yahoos of his nation, although I seemed to fail in strength, and agility, which must be imputed to my different way of living from those other brutes; and besides, I was not only endowed with the faculty of speech, but likewise with some rudiments of reason, to a degree, that with all his acquaintance I passed for a prodigy.

He made me observe, that among the Houyhnhnms, the white, the sorrel, and the iron grey were not so exactly shaped as the bay, the dapple grey, and the black; nor born with equal talents of mind, or a capacity to improve them; and therefore continued always in the condition of servants, without ever aspiring to match out of their own race, which in that country would be reckoned monstrous and unnatural.

I made his honor my most humble acknowledgments for the good opinion he was pleased to conceive of me; but assured him at the same time, that my birth was of the lower sort, having been born of plain, honest parents, who were just able to give me a tolerable education; that, nobility among us was altogether a different thing from the idea he had of it; that, our young noblemen are bred from their childhood in idleness and luxury; that, as soon as years will permit, they consume their vigor, and contract odious diseases among lewd females; and when their fortunes are almost ruined, they marry some woman of mean birth, disagreeable person, and unsound constitution, merely for the sake of money, whom they hate and despise. That, the productions of such marriages are generally scrofulous, rickety or deformed children; by which means

the family seldom continues above three generations, unless the wife take care to provide a healthy father among her neighbors, or domestics, in order to improve and continue the breed. That a weak diseased body, a meager countenance, and sallow complexion are the true marks of noble blood; and a healthy robust appearance is so disgraceful in a man of quality, that the world concludes his real father to have been a groom or a coachman. The imperfections of his mind run parallel with those of his body; being a composition of spleen, dullness, ignorance, caprice, sensuality, and pride.

Without the consent of this illustrious body, no law can be enacted, repealed, or altered, and these nobles have likewise the decision of all our possessions without appeal.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Still did not understand.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Prove.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An act passed at each session of Parliament to protect ministers of state who in good faith might have acted illegally.[Return to reference 3](#)

CHAPTER 7. *The Author's great love of his native country. His master's observations upon the constitution and administration of England, as described by the Author, with parallel cases and comparisons. His master's observations upon human nature.*

The reader may be disposed to wonder how I could prevail on myself to give so free a representation of my own species, among a race of mortals who were already too apt to conceive the vilest opinion of humankind, from that entire congruity betwixt me and their Yahoos. But I must freely confess that the many virtues of those excellent quadrupeds placed in opposite view to human corruptions had so far opened my eyes, and enlarged my understanding, that I began to view the actions and passions of man in a very different light; and to think the honor of my own kind not worth managing;<sup>4</sup> which, besides, it was impossible for me to do before a person of so acute a judgment as my master, who daily convinced me of a thousand faults in myself, whereof I had not the least perception before, and which with us would never be numbered even among human infirmities. I had likewise learned from his example an utter detestation of all falsehood or disguise; and truth appeared so amiable to me, that I determined upon sacrificing everything to it.

Let me deal so candidly with the reader as to confess that there was yet a much stronger motive for the freedom I took in my representation of things. I had not been a year in this country, before I contracted such a love and veneration for the inhabitants, that I entered on a firm resolution never to return to humankind, but to pass the rest of my life among these admirable Houyhnhnms in the contemplation and practice of every virtue; where I could have no example or incitement to vice. But it was decreed by fortune, my perpetual enemy, that so great a felicity should not fall to my share. However, it is now some comfort to reflect that in what I said of my countrymen, I extenuated their faults as much as I durst before so strict an examiner; and upon every article, gave as favorable a turn



as the matter would bear. For, indeed, who is there alive that will not be swayed by his bias and partiality to the place of his birth?

I have related the substance of several conversations I had with my master, during the greatest part of the time I had the honor to be in his service; but have indeed for brevity sake omitted much more than is here set down.

When I had answered all his questions, and his curiosity seemed to be fully satisfied; he sent for me one morning early, and commanding me to sit down at some distance (an honor which he had never before conferred upon me), he said he had been very seriously considering my whole story, as far as it related both to myself and my country; that, he looked upon us as a sort of animals to whose share, by what accident he could not conjecture, some small pittance of reason had fallen, whereof we made no other use than by its assistance to aggravate our natural corruptions, and to acquire new ones which nature had not given us. That we disarmed ourselves of the few abilities she had bestowed; had been very successful in multiplying our original wants, and seemed to spend our whole lives in vain endeavors to supply them by our own inventions. That, as to myself, it was manifest I had neither the strength or agility of a common Yahoo; that I walked infirmly on my hinder feet; had found out a contrivance to make my claws of no use or defense, and to remove the hair from my chin, which was intended as a shelter from the sun and the weather. Lastly, that I could neither run with speed, nor climb trees like my brethren (as he called them) the Yahoos in this country.

That our institutions of government and law were plainly owing to our gross defects in reason, and by consequence, in virtue; because reason alone is sufficient to govern a rational creature; which was therefore a character we had no pretense to challenge, even from the account I had given of my own people; although he manifestly perceived, that in order to favor them, I had concealed many particulars, and often *said the thing which was not*.

He was the more confirmed in this opinion, because he observed that I agreed in every feature of my body with other Yahoos, except

where it was to my real disadvantage in point of strength, speed, and activity, the shortness of my claws, and some other particulars where Nature had no part; so, from the representation I had given him of our lives, our manners, and our actions, he found as near a resemblance in the disposition of our minds. He said the Yahoos were known to hate one another more than they did any different species of animals; and the reason usually assigned was the odiousness of their own shapes, which all could see in the rest, but not in themselves. He had therefore begun to think it not unwise in us to cover our bodies, and by that invention, conceal many of our deformities from each other, which would else be hardly supportable. But he now found he had been mistaken; and that the dissensions of those brutes in his country were owing to the same cause with ours, as I had described them. For, if (said he) you throw among five Yahoos as much food as would be sufficient for fifty, they will instead of eating peaceably, fall together by the ears, each single one impatient to have all to itself; and therefore a servant was usually employed to stand by while they were feeding abroad, and those kept at home were tied at a distance from each other. That, if a cow died of age or accident, before a Houyhnhnm could secure it for his own Yahoos, those in the neighborhood would come in herds to seize it, and then would ensue such a battle as I had described, with terrible wounds made by their claws on both sides, although they seldom were able to kill one another, for want of such convenient instruments of death as we had invented. At other times the like battles have been fought between the Yahoos of several neighborhoods without any visible cause; those of one district watching all opportunities to surprise the next before they are prepared. But if they find their project hath miscarried, they return home, and for want of enemies, engage in what I call a civil war among themselves.

That, in some fields of his country, there are certain shining stones of several colors, whereof the Yahoos are violently fond; and when part of these stones are fixed in the earth, as it sometimes happeneth, they will dig with their claws for whole days to get them

out, and carry them away, and hide them by heaps in their kennels; but still looking round with great caution, for fear their comrades should find out their treasure. My master said he could never discover the reason of this unnatural appetite, or how these stones could be of any use to a Yahoo; but now he believed it might proceed from the same principle of avarice, which I had ascribed to mankind. That he had once, by way of experiment, privately removed a heap of these stones from the place where one of his Yahoos had buried it, whereupon, the sordid animal missing his treasure, by his loud lamenting brought the whole herd to the place, there miserably howled, then fell to biting and tearing the rest; began to pine away, would neither eat nor sleep, nor work, till he ordered a servant privately to convey the stones into the same hole, and hide them as before; which when his Yahoo had found, he presently recovered his spirits and good humor; but took care to remove them to a better hiding place; and hath ever since been a very serviceable brute.

My master farther assured me, which I also observed myself, that in the fields where these shining stones abound, the fiercest and most frequent battles are fought, occasioned by perpetual inroads of the neighboring Yahoos.

He said it was common when two Yahoos discovered such a stone in a field, and were contending which of them should be the proprietor, a third would take the advantage, and carry it away from them both; which my master would needs contend to have some resemblance with our suits at law; wherein I thought it for our credit not to undeceive him; since the decision he mentioned was much more equitable than many decrees among us; because the plaintiff and defendant there lost nothing beside the stone they contended for; whereas our courts of equity would never have dismissed the cause while either of them had anything left.

My master continuing his discourse said there was nothing that rendered the Yahoos more odious, than their undistinguished appetite to devour everything that came in their way, whether herbs, roots, berries, corrupted flesh of animals, or all mingled together;

and it was peculiar in their temper, that they were fonder of what they could get by rapine or stealth at a greater distance, than much better food provided for them at home. If their prey held out, they would eat till they were ready to burst, after which nature had pointed out to them a certain root that gave them a general evacuation.

There was also another kind of root very juicy, but something rare and difficult to be found, which the Yahoos sought for with much eagerness, and would suck it with great delight; it produced the same effects that wine hath upon us. It would make them sometimes hug, and sometimes tear one another; they would howl and grin, and chatter, and reel, and tumble, and then fall asleep in the mud.

I did indeed observe that the Yahoos were the only animals in this country subject to any diseases; which however, were much fewer than horses have among us, and contracted not by any ill treatment they meet with, but by the nastiness and greediness of that sordid brute. Neither has their language any more than a general appellation for those maladies; which is borrowed from the name of the beast, and called *Hnea Yahoo*, or the Yahoo's Evil; and the cure prescribed is a mixture of their own dung and urine, forcibly put down the Yahoo's throat. This I have since often known to have been taken with success, and do here freely recommend it to my countrymen, for the public good, as an admirable specific<sup>5</sup> against all diseases produced by repletion.

As to learning, government, arts, manufactures, and the like, my master confessed he could find little or no resemblance between the Yahoos of that country and those in ours. For he only meant to observe what parity there was in our natures. He had heard indeed some curious Houyhnhnms observe that in most herds there was a sort of ruling Yahoo (as among us there is generally some leading or principal stag in a park) who was always more deformed in body, and mischievous in disposition, than any of the rest. That this leader had usually a favorite as like himself as he could get, whose employment was to lick his master's feet and posteriors, and drive

the female Yahoos to his kennel; for which he was now and then rewarded with a piece of ass's flesh. This favorite is hated by the whole herd; and therefore to protect himself, keeps always near the person of his leader. He usually continues in office till a worse can be found; but the very moment he is discarded, his successor, at the head of all the Yahoos in that district, young and old, male and female, come in a body, and discharge their excrements upon him from head to foot. But how far this might be applicable to our courts and favorites, and ministers of state, my master said I could best determine.

I durst make no return to this malicious insinuation, which debased human understanding below the sagacity of a common hound, who hath judgment enough to distinguish and follow the cry of the ablest dog in the pack, without being ever mistaken.

My master told me there were some qualities remarkable in the Yahoos, which he had not observed me to mention, or at least very slightly, in the accounts I had given him of humankind. He said, those animals, like other brutes, had their females in common; but in this they differed, that the she-Yahoo would admit the male while she was pregnant; and that the hes would quarrel and fight with the females as fiercely as with each other. Both which practices were such degrees of infamous brutality, that no other sensitive creature ever arrived at.

Another thing he wondered at in the Yahoos was their strange disposition to nastiness and dirt; whereas there appears to be a natural love of cleanliness in all other animals. As to the two former accusations, I was glad to let them pass without any reply, because I had not a word to offer upon them in defense of my species, which otherwise I certainly had done from my own inclinations. But I could have easily vindicated humankind from the imputation of singularity upon the last article, if there had been any swine in that country (as unluckily for me there were not) which although it may be a sweeter quadruped than a Yahoo, cannot I humbly conceive in justice pretend to more cleanliness; and so his honor himself must have

owned, if he had seen their filthy way of feeding, and their custom of wallowing and sleeping in the mud.

My master likewise mentioned another quality, which his servants had discovered in several Yahoos, and to him was wholly unaccountable. He said, a fancy would sometimes take a Yahoo, to retire into a corner, to lie down and howl, and groan, and spurn away all that came near him, although he were young and fat, and wanted neither food nor water; nor did the servants imagine what could possibly ail him. And the only remedy they found was to set him to hard work, after which he would infallibly come to himself. To this I was silent out of partiality to my own kind; yet here I could plainly discover the true seeds of spleen,<sup>6</sup> which only seizeth on the lazy, the luxurious, and the rich; who, if they were forced to undergo the same regimen, I would undertake for the cure.

His Honor had farther observed, that a female Yahoo would often stand behind a bank or a bush, to gaze on the young males passing by, and then appear, and hide, using many antic gestures and grimaces; at which time it was observed, that she had a most offensive smell; and when any of the males advanced, would slowly retire, looking back, and with a counterfeit show of fear, run off into some convenient place where she knew the male would follow her.

At other times, if a female stranger came among them, three or four of her own sex would get about her, and stare and chatter, and grin, and smell her all over; and then turn off with gestures that seemed to express contempt and disdain.

Perhaps my master might refine a little in these speculations, which he had drawn from what he observed himself, or had been told by others; however, I could not reflect without some amazement, and much sorrow, that the rudiments of lewdness, coquetry, censure, and scandal, should have place by instinct in womankind.

I expected every moment that my master would accuse the Yahoos of those unnatural appetites in both sexes, so common among us. But Nature it seems hath not been so expert a

schoolmistress; and these politer pleasures are entirely the productions of art and reason, on our side of the globe.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Defending.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Remedy.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Depression.[Return to reference 6](#)

CHAPTER 8. *The Author relateth several particulars of the Yahoos. The great virtues of the Houyhnhnms. The education and exercises of their youth. Their general assembly.*

As I ought to have understood human nature much better than I supposed it possible for my master to do, so it was easy to apply the character he gave of the Yahoos to myself and my countrymen; and I believed I could yet make farther discoveries from my own observation. I therefore often begged his honor to let me go among the herds of Yahoos in the neighborhood; to which he always very graciously consented, being perfectly convinced that the hatred I bore those brutes would never suffer me to be corrupted by them; and his honor ordered one of his servants, a strong sorrel nag, very honest and good-natured, to be my guard; without whose protection I durst not undertake such adventures. For I have already told the reader how much I was pestered by those odious animals upon my first arrival. I afterwards failed very narrowly three or four times of falling into their clutches, when I happened to stray at any distance without my hanger. And I have reason to believe, they had some imagination that I was of their own species, which I often assisted myself, by stripping up my sleeves, and shewing my naked arms and breast in their sight, when my protector was with me; at which times they would approach as near as they durst, and imitate my actions after the manner of monkeys, but ever with great signs of hatred; as a tame jackdaw with cap and stockings is always persecuted by the wild ones, when he happens to be got among them.

They are prodigiously nimble from their infancy; however, I once caught a young male of three years old, and endeavored by all marks of tenderness to make it quiet; but the little imp fell a squalling, and scratching, and biting with such violence, that I was forced to let it go; and it was high time, for a whole troop of old ones came about us at the noise; but finding the cub was safe (for away it ran) and my sorrel nag being by, they durst not venture near us. I observed the young animal's flesh to smell very rank, and the stink was somewhat between a weasel and a fox, but much more disagreeable. I forgot another circumstance (and perhaps I might



have the reader's pardon, if it were wholly omitted) that while I held the odious vermin in my hands, it voided its filthy excrements of a yellow liquid substance, all over my clothes; but by good fortune there was a small brook hard by, where I washed myself as clean as I could; although I durst not come into my master's presence until I were sufficiently aired.

By what I could discover, the Yahoos appear to be the most unteachable of all animals, their capacities never reaching higher than to draw or carry burdens. Yet I am of opinion, this defect ariseth chiefly from a perverse, restive disposition. For they are cunning, malicious, treacherous and revengeful. They are strong and hardy, but of a cowardly spirit, and by consequence insolent, abject, and cruel. It is observed that the red-haired of both sexes are more libidinous and mischievous than the rest, whom yet they much exceed in strength and activity.

The Houyhnhnms keep the Yahoos for present use in huts not far from the house; but the rest are sent abroad to certain fields, where they dig up roots, eat several kinds of herbs, and search about for carrion, or sometimes catch weasels and *luhimuhs* (a sort of wild rat) which they greedily devour. Nature hath taught them to dig deep holes with their nails on the side of a rising ground, wherein they lie by themselves; only the kennels of the females are larger, sufficient to hold two or three cubs.

They swim from their infancy like frogs, and are able to continue long under water, where they often take fish, which the females carry home to their young. And upon this occasion, I hope the reader will pardon my relating an odd adventure.

Being one day abroad with my protector the sorrel nag, and the weather exceeding hot, I entreated him to let me bathe in a river that was near. He consented, and I immediately stripped myself stark naked, and went down softly into the stream. It happened that a young female Yahoo standing behind a bank, saw the whole proceeding; and inflamed by desire, as the nag and I conjectured, came running with all speed, and leaped into the water within five yards of the place where I bathed. I was never in my life so terribly

frighted; the nag was grazing at some distance, not suspecting any harm. She embraced me after a most fulsome manner; I roared as loud as I could, and the nag came galloping towards me, whereupon she quitted her grasp, with the utmost reluctancy, and leaped upon the opposite bank, where she stood gazing and howling all the time I was putting on my clothes.

This was matter of diversion to my master and his family, as well as of mortification to myself. For now I could no longer deny that I was a real Yahoo, in every limb and feature, since the females had a natural propensity to me as one of their own species; neither was the hair of this brute of a red color (which might have been some excuse for an appetite a little irregular) but black as a sloe, and her countenance did not make an appearance altogether so hideous as the rest of the kind; for I think, she could not be above eleven years old.

Having already lived three years in this country, the reader I suppose will expect that I should, like other travelers, give him some account of the manners and customs of its inhabitants, which it was indeed my principal study to learn.

As these noble Houyhnhnms are endowed by Nature with a general disposition to all virtues, and have no conceptions or ideas of what is evil in a rational creature; so their grand maxim is to cultivate reason, and to be wholly governed by it. Neither is reason among them a point problematical as with us, where men can argue with plausibility on both sides of a question; but strikes you with immediate conviction; as it must needs do where it is not mingled, obscured, or discolored by passion and interest. I remember it was with extreme difficulty that I could bring my master to understand the meaning of the word "opinion," or how a point could be disputable; because reason taught us to affirm or deny only where we are certain; and beyond our knowledge we cannot do either. So that controversies, wranglings, disputes, and positiveness in false or dubious propositions are evils unknown among the Houyhnhnms. In the like manner when I used to explain to him our several systems of natural philosophy,<sup>7</sup> he would laugh that a creature pretending to

reason should value itself upon the knowledge of other people's conjectures, and in things, where that knowledge, if it were certain, could be of no use. Wherein he agreed entirely with the sentiments of Socrates, as Plato delivers them, which I mention as the highest honor I can do that prince of philosophers. I have often since reflected what destruction such a doctrine would make in the libraries of Europe; and how many paths to fame would be then shut up in the learned world.

Friendship and benevolence are the two principal virtues among the Houyhnhnms; and these not confined to particular objects, but universal to the whole race. For a stranger from the remotest part is equally treated with the nearest neighbor, and wherever he goes, looks upon himself as at home. They preserve decency and civility in the highest degrees, but are altogether ignorant of ceremony. They have no fondness for their colts or foals; but the care they take in educating them proceedeth entirely from the dictates of reason. And I observed my master to show the same affection to his neighbor's issue that he had for his own. They will have it that Nature teaches them to love the whole species, and it is reason only that maketh a distinction of persons, where there is a superior degree of virtue.

When the matron Houyhnhnms have produced one of each sex, they no longer accompany with their consorts, except they lose one of their issue by some casualty, which very seldom happens; but in such a case they meet again; or when the like accident befalls a person whose wife is past bearing, some other couple bestows on him one of their own colts, and then go together a second time, until the mother be pregnant. This caution is necessary to prevent the country from being overburdened with numbers. But the race of inferior Houyhnhnms bred up to be servants is not so strictly limited upon this article; these are allowed to produce three of each sex, to be domestics in the noble families.

In their marriages they are exactly careful to choose such colors as will not make any disagreeable mixture in the breed. Strength is chiefly valued in the male, and comeliness in the female; not upon the account of love, but to preserve the race from degenerating; for,

where a female happens to excel in strength, a consort is chosen with regard to comeliness. Courtship, love, presents, jointures, settlements, have no place in their thoughts, or terms whereby to express them in their language. The young couple meet and are joined, merely because it is the determination of their parents and friends; it is what they see done every day; and they look upon it as one of the necessary actions in a reasonable being. But the violation of marriage, or any other unchastity, was never heard of; and the married pair pass their lives with the same friendship and mutual benevolence that they bear to all others of the same species who come in their way, without jealousy, fondness, quarreling, or discontent.

In educating the youth of both sexes, their method is admirable, and highly deserveth our imitation. These are not suffered to taste a grain of oats, except upon certain days, till eighteen years old; nor milk, but very rarely; and in summer they graze two hours in the morning, and as many in the evening, which their parents likewise observe; but the servants are not allowed above half that time; and a great part of the grass is brought home, which they eat at the most convenient hours when they can be best spared from work.

Temperance, industry, exercise, and cleanliness are the lessons equally enjoined to the young ones of both sexes; and my master thought it monstrous in us to give the females a different kind of education from the males, except in some articles of domestic management; whereby, as he truly observed, one half of our natives were good for nothing but bringing children into the world; and to trust the care of their children to such useless animals, he said was yet a greater instance of brutality.

But the Houyhnhnms train up their youth to strength, speed, and hardiness, by exercising them in running races up and down steep hills, or over hard stony grounds; and when they are all in a sweat, they are ordered to leap over head and ears into a pond or a river. Four times a year the youth of certain districts meet to show their proficiency in running, and leaping, and other feats of strength or agility; where the victor is rewarded with a song made in his or her

praise. On this festival the servants drive a herd of Yahoos into the field, laden with hay, and oats, and milk for a repast to the Houyhnhnms; after which these brutes are immediately driven back again, for fear of being noisome to the assembly.

Every fourth year, at the vernal equinox, there is a representative council of the whole nation, which meets in a plain about twenty miles from our house, and continueth about five or six days. Here they inquire into the state and condition of the several districts; whether they abound or be deficient in hay or oats, or cows or Yahoos? And wherever there is any want (which is but seldom) it is immediately supplied by unanimous consent and contribution. Here likewise the regulation of children is settled: as for instance, if a Houyhnhnm hath two males, he changeth one of them with another who hath two females, and when a child hath been lost by any casualty, where the mother is past breeding, it is determined what family in the district shall breed another to supply the loss.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Science.[Return to reference 7](#)

CHAPTER 9. *A grand debate at the general assembly of the Houyhnhnms, and how it was determined. The learning of the Houyhnhnms. Their buildings. Their manner of burials. The defectiveness of their language.*

One of these grand assemblies was held in my time, about three months before my departure, whither my master went as the representative of our district. In this council was resumed their old debate, and indeed, the only debate that ever happened in their country; whereof my master after his return gave me a very particular account.

The question to be debated was whether the Yahoos should be exterminated from the face of the earth. One of the members for the affirmative offered several arguments of great strength and weight, alleging that, as the Yahoos were the most filthy, noisome, and deformed animal which nature ever produced, so they were the most restive and indocible,<sup>8</sup> mischievous, and malicious; they would privately suck the teats of the Houyhnhnms' cows; kill and devour their cats, trample down their oats and grass, if they were not continually watched; and commit a thousand other extravagancies. He took notice of a general tradition, that Yahoos had not been always in their country, but that many ages ago, two of these brutes appeared together upon a mountain; whether produced by the heat of the sun upon corrupted mud and slime, or from the ooze and froth of the sea, was never known. That these Yahoos engendered, and their brood in a short time grew so numerous as to overrun and infest the whole nation. That the Houyhnhnms to get rid of this evil, made a general hunting, and at last enclosed the whole herd; and destroying the older, every Houyhnhnm kept two young ones in a kennel, and brought them to such a degree of tameness as an animal so savage by nature can be capable of acquiring, using them for draught and carriage. That there seemed to be much truth in this tradition, and that those creatures could not be *ylnhniamshy* (or aborigines of the land) because of the violent hatred the Houyhnhnms as well as all other animals bore them; which although

their evil disposition sufficiently deserved, could never have arrived at so high a degree, if they had been aborigines, or else they would have long since been rooted out. That the inhabitants taking a fancy to use the service of the Yahoos, had very imprudently neglected to cultivate the breed of asses, which were a comely animal, easily kept, more tame and orderly, without any offensive smell, strong enough for labor, although they yield to the other in agility of body; and if their braying be no agreeable sound, it is far preferable to the horrible howlings of the Yahoos.

Several others declared their sentiments to the same purpose, when my master proposed an expedient to the assembly, whereof he had indeed borrowed the hint from me. He approved of the tradition, mentioned by the honorable member, who spoke before; and affirmed, that the two Yahoos said to be first seen among them, had been driven thither over the sea; that coming to land, and being forsaken by their companions, they retired to the mountains, and degenerating by degrees, became in process of time much more savage than those of their own species in the country from whence these two originals came. The reason of his assertion was that he had now in his possession a certain wonderful Yahoo (meaning myself) which most of them had heard of, and many of them had seen. He then related to them how he first found me; that my body was all covered with an artificial composure of the skins and hairs of other animals; that I spoke in a language of my own, and had thoroughly learned theirs; that I had related to him the accidents which brought me thither; that when he saw me without my covering, I was an exact Yahoo in every part, only of a whiter color, less hairy and with shorter claws. He added how I had endeavored to persuade him that in my own and other countries the Yahoos acted as the governing, rational animal, and held the Houyhnhnms in servitude; that he observed in me all the qualities of a Yahoo, only a little more civilized by some tincture of reason, which however was in a degree as far inferior to the Houyhnhnm race as the Yahoos of their country were to me; that among other things, I mentioned a custom we had of castrating Houyhnhnms when they were young, in

order to render them tame; that the operation was easy and safe; that it was no shame to learn wisdom from brutes, as industry is taught by the ant, and building by the swallow (for so I translate the word *lyhannh*, although it be a much larger fowl). That this invention might be practiced upon the younger Yahoos here, which, besides rendering them tractable and fitter for use, would in an age put an end to the whole species without destroying life. That in the meantime the Houyhnhnms should be exhorted to cultivate the breed of asses, which, as they are in all respects more valuable brutes, so they have this advantage, to be fit for service at five years old, which the other are not till twelve.

This was all my master thought fit to tell me at that time, of what passed in the grand council. But he was pleased to conceal one particular, which related personally to myself, whereof I soon felt the unhappy effect, as the reader will know in its proper place, and from whence I date all the succeeding misfortunes of my life.

The Houyhnhnms have no letters, and consequently, their knowledge is all traditional. But there happening few events of any moment among a people so well united, naturally disposed to every virtue, wholly governed by reason, and cut off from all commerce with other nations, the historical part is easily preserved without burdening their memories. I have already observed that they are subject to no diseases, and therefore can have no need of physicians. However, they have excellent medicines composed of herbs, to cure accidental bruises and cuts in the pastern or frog<sup>9</sup> of the foot by sharp stones, as well as other maims and hurts in the several parts of the body.

They calculate the year by the revolution of the sun and the moon, but use no subdivisions into weeks. They are well enough acquainted with the motions of those two luminaries, and understand the nature of eclipses; and this is the utmost progress of their astronomy.

In poetry they must be allowed to excel all other mortals; wherein the justness of their similes, and the minuteness, as well as exactness of their descriptions, are indeed inimitable. Their verses



abound very much in both of these, and usually contain either some exalted notions of friendship and benevolence, or the praises of those who were victors in races and other bodily exercises. Their buildings, although very rude and simple, are not inconvenient, but well contrived to defend them from all injuries of cold and heat. They have a kind of tree, which at forty years old loosens in the root, and falls with the first storm; it grows very straight, and being pointed like stakes with a sharp stone (for the Houyhnhnms know not the use of iron), they stick them erect in the ground about ten inches asunder, and then weave in oat straw, or sometimes wattles, betwixt them. The roof is made after the same manner, and so are the doors.

The Houyhnhnms use the hollow part between the pastern and the hoof of their forefeet as we do our hands, and this with greater dexterity than I could at first imagine. I have seen a white mare of our family thread a needle (which I lent her on purpose) with that joint. They milk their cows, reap their oats, and do all the work which requires hands in the same manner. They have a kind of hard flints, which by grinding against other stones they form into instruments that serve instead of wedges, axes, and hammers. With tools made of these flints, they likewise cut their hay, and reap their oats, which there groweth naturally in several fields. The Yahoos draw home the sheaves in carriages, and the servants tread them in certain covered huts, to get out the grain, which is kept in stores. They make a rude kind of earthen and wooden vessels, and bake the former in the sun.

If they can avoid casualties, they die only of old age, and are buried in the obscurest places that can be found, their friends and relations expressing neither joy nor grief at their departure; nor does the dying person discover the least regret that he is leaving the world, any more than if he were upon returning home from a visit to one of his neighbors; I remember my master having once made an appointment with a friend and his family to come to his house upon some affair of importance; on the day fixed, the mistress and her two children came very late; she made two excuses, first for her

husband, who, as she said, happened that very morning to *lhnuwnh*. The word is strongly expressive in their language, but not easily rendered into English; it signifies, *to retire to his first Mother*. Her excuse for not coming sooner was that her husband dying late in the morning, she was a good while consulting her servants about a convenient place where his body should be laid; and I observed she behaved herself at our house, as cheerfully as the rest. She died about three months after.

They live generally to seventy or seventy-five years, very seldom to fourscore; some weeks before their death they feel a gradual decay, but without pain. During this time they are much visited by their friends, because they cannot go abroad with their usual ease and satisfaction. However, about ten days before their death, which they seldom fail in computing, they return the visits that have been made by those who are nearest in the neighborhood, being carried in a convenient sledge drawn by Yahoos; which vehicle they use, not only upon this occasion, but when they grow old, upon long journeys, or when they are lamed by any accident. And therefore when the dying Houyhnhnms return those visits, they take a solemn leave of their friends, as if they were going to some remote part of the country, where they designed to pass the rest of their lives.

I know not whether it may be worth observing, that the Houyhnhnms have no word in their language to express anything that is evil, except what they borrow from the deformities or ill qualities of the Yahoos. Thus they denote the folly of a servant, an omission of a child, a stone that cuts their feet, a continuance of foul or unseasonable weather, and the like, by adding to each the epithet of Yahoo. For instance, *hhnm Yahoo*, *whnaholm Yahoo*, *ynlhmndwihlma Yahoo*, and an ill-contrived house, *ynholmhnmrohlnw Yahoo*.

I could with great pleasure enlarge farther upon the manners and virtues of this excellent people; but intending in a short time to publish a volume by itself expressly upon that subject, I refer the reader thither. And in the meantime, proceed to relate my own sad catastrophe.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Unteachable. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Sole. [Return to reference 9](#)

CHAPTER 10. *The Author's economy, and happy life among the Houyhnhnms. His great improvement in virtue, by conversing with them. Their conversations. The Author hath notice given him by his master that he must depart from the country. He falls into a swoon for grief, but submits. He contrives and finishes a canoe, by the help of a fellow servant, and puts to sea at a venture.*

I had settled my little economy to my own heart's content. My master had ordered a room to be made for me after their manner, about six yards from the house; the sides and floors of which I plastered with clay, and covered with rush mats of my own contriving; I had beaten hemp, which there grows wild, and made of it a sort of ticking; this I filled with the feathers of several birds I had taken with springes made of Yahoos' hairs, and were excellent food. I had worked two chairs with my knife, the sorrel nag helping me in the grosser and more laborious part. When my clothes were worn to rags, I made myself others with the skins of rabbits, and of a certain beautiful animal about the same size, called *nnuhnoh*, the skin of which is covered with a fine down. Of these I likewise made very tolerable stockings. I soled my shoes with wood which I cut from a tree, and fitted to the upper leather, and when this was worn out, I supplied it with the skins of Yahoos, dried in the sun. I often got honey out of hollow trees, which I mingled with water, or eat it with my bread. No man could more verify the truth of these two maxims, that *Nature is very easily satisfied*; and, that *Necessity is the mother of invention*. I enjoyed perfect health of body, and tranquility of mind; I did not feel the treachery or inconstancy of a friend, nor the inquiries of a secret or open enemy. I had no occasion of bribing, flattering, or pimping to procure the favor of any great man, or of his minion. I wanted no fence against fraud or oppression; here was neither physician to destroy my body, nor lawyer to ruin my fortune; no informer to watch my words and actions, or forge accusations against me for hire; here were no gibbers, censurers, backbiters, pickpockets, highwaymen, housebreakers, attorneys, bawds, buffoons, gamesters, politicians, wits, splenetics, tedious talkers,

controvertists, ravishers, murderers, robbers, virtuosos;<sup>1</sup> no leaders or followers of party and faction; no encouragers to vice, by seducement or examples; no dungeons, axes, gibbets, whipping posts, or pillories; no cheating shopkeepers or mechanics; no pride, vanity or affectation; no fops, bullies, drunkards, strolling whores, or poxes; no ranting, lewd, expensive wives; no stupid, proud pedants; no importunate, overbearing, quarrelsome, noisy, roaring, empty, conceited, swearing companions; no scoundrels raised from the dust upon the merit of their vices; or nobility thrown into it on account of their virtues; no lords, fiddlers, judges, or dancing masters.

I had the favor of being admitted to several Houyhnhnms, who came to visit or dine with my master; where his honor graciously suffered me to wait in the room, and listen to their discourse. Both he and his company would often descend to ask me questions, and receive my answers. I had also sometimes the honor of attending my master in his visits to others. I never presumed to speak, except in answer to a question; and then I did it with inward regret, because it was a loss of so much time for improving myself; but I was infinitely delighted with the station of an humble auditor in such conversations, where nothing passed but what was useful, expressed in the fewest and most significant words; where (as I have already said) the greatest decency was observed, without the least degree of ceremony; where no person spoke without being pleased himself, and pleasing his companions; where there was no interruption, tediousness, heat, or difference of sentiments. They have a notion, that when people are met together, a short silence doth much improve conversation; this I found to be true; for during those little intermissions of talk, new ideas would arise in their minds, which very much enlivened the discourse. Their subjects are generally on friendship and benevolence; on order and economy; sometimes upon the visible operations of nature, or ancient traditions; upon the bounds and limits of virtue; upon the unerring rules of reason; or upon some determinations, to be taken at the next great assembly; and often upon the various excellencies of poetry. I may add, without vanity, that my presence often gave them

sufficient matter for discourse, because it afforded my master an occasion of letting his friends into the history of me and my country, upon which they were all pleased to descant in a manner not very advantageous to human kind; and for that reason I shall not repeat what they said; only I maybe allowed to observe that his honor, to my great admiration, appeared to understand the nature of Yahoos much better than myself. He went through all our vices and follies, and discovered many which I had never mentioned to him; by only supposing what qualities a Yahoo of their country, with a small proportion of reason, might be capable of exerting; and concluded, with too much probability, how vile as well as miserable such a creature must be.

I freely confess, that all the little knowledge I have of any value was acquired by the lectures I received from my master, and from hearing the discourses of him and his friends; to which I should be prouder to listen, than to dictate to the greatest and wisest assembly in Europe. I admired the strength, comeliness, and speed of the inhabitants; and such a constellation of virtues in such amiable persons produced in me the highest veneration. At first, indeed, I did not feel that natural awe which the Yahoos and all other animals bear towards them; but it grew upon me by degrees, much sooner than I imagined, and was mingled with a respectful love and gratitude, that they would condescend to distinguish me from the rest of my species.

When I thought of my family, my friends, my countrymen, or human race in general, I considered them as they really were, Yahoos in shape and disposition, perhaps a little more civilized, and qualified with the gift of speech; but making no other use of reason than to improve and multiply those vices, whereof their brethren in this country had only the share that nature allotted them. When I happened to behold the reflection of my own form in a lake or fountain, I turned away my face in horror and detestation of myself, and could better endure the sight of a common Yahoo than of my own person. By conversing with the Houyhnhnms, and looking upon them with delight, I fell to imitate their gait and gesture, which is

now grown into a habit; and my friends often tell me in a blunt way, that I trot like a horse; which, however, I take for a great compliment. Neither shall I disown, that in speaking I am apt to fall into the voice and manner of the Houyhnhnms, and hear myself ridiculed on that account without the least mortification.

In the midst of this happiness, when I looked upon myself to be fully settled for life, my master sent for me one morning a little earlier than his usual hour. I observed by his countenance that he was in some perplexity, and at a loss how to begin what he had to speak. After a short silence, he told me, he did not know how I would take what he was going to say; that, in the last general assembly, when the affair of the Yahoos was entered upon, the representatives had taken offense at his keeping a Yahoo (meaning myself) in his family more like a Houyhnhnm than a brute animal. That he was known frequently to converse with me, as if he could receive some advantage of pleasure in my company; that such a practice was not agreeable to reason or nature, or a thing ever heard of before among them. The assembly did therefore exhort him, either to employ me like the rest of my species, or command me to swim back to the place from whence I came. That the first of these expedients was utterly rejected by all the Houyhnhnms who had ever seen me at his house or their own; for, they alleged, that because I had some rudiments of reason, added to the natural pravity<sup>2</sup> of those animals, it was to be feared, I might be able to seduce them into the woody and mountainous parts of the country, and bring them in troops by night to destroy the Houyhnhnms' cattle, as being naturally of the ravenous kind, and averse from labor.

My master added that he was daily pressed by the Houyhnhnms of the neighborhood to have the assembly's exhortation executed, which he could not put off much longer. He doubted<sup>3</sup> it would be impossible for me to swim to another country; and therefore wished I would contrive some sort of vehicle resembling those I had described to him, that might carry me on the sea; in which work I should have the assistance of his own servants, as well as those of

his neighbors. He concluded that for his own part he could have been content to keep me in his service as long as I lived; because he found I had cured myself of some bad habits and dispositions, by endeavoring, as far as my inferior nature was capable, to imitate the Houyhnhnms.

I should here observe to the reader, that a decree of the general assembly in this country is expressed by the word *hnhloayn*, which signifies an exhortation, as near as I can render it; for they have no conception how a rational creature can be compelled, but only advised, or exhorted; because no person can disobey reason without giving up his claim to be a rational creature.

I was struck with the utmost grief and despair at my master's discourse; and being unable to support the agonies I was under, I fell into a swoon at his feet; when I came to myself, he told me that he concluded I had been dead (for these people are subject to no such imbecilities of nature). I answered, in a faint voice, that death would have been too great an happiness; that although I could not blame the assembly's exhortation, or the urgency of his friends; yet in my weak and corrupt judgment, I thought it might consist with reason to have been less rigorous. That I could not swim a league, and probably the nearest land to theirs might be distant above an hundred; that many materials, necessary for making a small vessel to carry me off, were wholly wanting in this country, which, however, I would attempt in obedience and gratitude to his honor, although I concluded the thing to be impossible, and therefore looked on myself as already devoted<sup>4</sup> to destruction. That the certain prospect of an unnatural death was the least of my evils; for, supposing I should escape with life by some strange adventure, how could I think with temper<sup>5</sup> of passing my days among Yahoos, and relapsing into my old corruptions, for want of examples to lead and keep me within the paths of virtue. That I knew too well upon what solid reasons all the determinations of the wise Houyhnhnms were founded, not to be shaken by arguments of mine, a miserable Yahoo; and therefore after presenting him with my humble thanks for the offer of his servants' assistance in making a vessel, and



desiring a reasonable time for so difficult a work, I told him I would endeavor to preserve a wretched being; and, if ever I returned to England, was not without hopes of being useful to my own species by celebrating the praises of the renowned Houyhnhnms, and proposing their virtues to the imitation of mankind.

My master in a few words made me a very gracious reply, allowed me the space of two months to finish my boat, and ordered the sorrel nag, my fellow servant (for so at this distance I may presume to call him), to follow my instructions, because I told my master that his help would be sufficient, and I knew he had a tenderness for me.

In his company my first business was to go to that part of the coast where my rebellious crew had ordered me to be set on shore. I got upon a height, and looking on every side into the sea, fancied I saw a small island towards the northeast; I took out my pocket glass, and could then clearly distinguish it about five leagues off, as I computed; but it appeared to the sorrel nag to be only a blue cloud; for, as he had no conception of any country besides his own, so he could not be as expert in distinguishing remote objects at sea, as we who so much converse in that element.

After I had discovered this island, I considered no farther; but resolved, it should, if possible, be the first place of my banishment, leaving the consequence to fortune.

I returned home, and consulting with the sorrel nag, we went into a copse at some distance, where I with my knife, and he with a sharp flint fastened very artificially,<sup>6</sup> after their manner, to a wooden handle, cut down several oak wattles about the thickness of a walking staff, and some larger pieces. But I shall not trouble the reader with a particular description of my own mechanics; let it suffice to say, that in six weeks time, with the help of the sorrel nag, who performed the parts that required most labor, I finished a sort of Indian canoe; but much larger, covering it with the skins of Yahoos, well stitched together, with hempen threads of my own making. My sail was likewise composed of the skins of the same animal; but I made use of the youngest I could get, the older being

too tough and thick; and I likewise provided myself with four paddles. I laid in a stock of boiled flesh, of rabbits and fowls; and took with me two vessels, one filled with milk, and the other with water.

I tried my canoe in a large pond near my master's house, and then corrected in it what was amiss, stopping all the chinks with Yahoo's tallow, till I found it staunch, and able to bear me and my freight. And when it was as complete as I could possibly make it, I had it drawn on a carriage very gently by Yahoos, to the seaside, under the conduct of the sorrel nag and another servant.

When all was ready, and the day came for my departure, I took leave of my master and lady, and the whole family, my eyes flowing with tears and my heart quite sunk with grief.<sup>7</sup> But his honor, out of curiosity, and perhaps (if I may speak it without vanity) partly out of kindness, was determined to see me in my canoe; and got several of his neighboring friends to accompany him. I was forced to wait above an hour for the tide, and then observing the wind very fortunately bearing towards the island to which I intended to steer my course, I took a second leave of my master; but as I was going to prostrate myself to kiss his hoof, he did me the honor to raise it gently to my mouth. I am not ignorant how much I have been censured for mentioning this last particular. Detractors are pleased to think it improbable that so illustrious a person should descend to give so great a mark of distinction to a creature so inferior as I. Neither have I forgot how apt some travelers are to boast of extraordinary favors they have received. But, if these censurers were better acquainted with the noble and courteous disposition of the Houyhnhnms, they would soon change their opinion. I paid my respects to the rest of the Houyhnhnms in his honor's company; then getting into my canoe, I pushed off from shore.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Those who pursue special interests in the arts or sciences.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Corruption. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Feared. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Doomed. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Equanimity. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Artfully. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: For a depiction of this scene by Sawrey Gilpin, See the Image Gallery for this volume. [Return to reference 7](#)

CHAPTER 11. *The Author's dangerous voyage. He arrives at New Holland, hoping to settle there. Is wounded with an arrow by one of the natives. Is seized and carried by force into a Portuguese ship. The great civilities of the Captain. The Author arrives at England.*

I began this desperate voyage on February 15, 1714/5,<sup>8</sup> at 9 o'clock in the morning. The wind was very favorable; however, I made use at first only of my paddles; but considering I should soon be weary, and that the wind might probably chop about, I ventured to set up my little sail, and thus, with the help of the tide, I went at the rate of a league and a half an hour, as near as I could guess. My master and his friends continued on the shore, till I was almost out of sight; and I often heard the sorrel nag (who always loved me) crying out, "*Hnuy illa nyha maiah Yahoo*" ("Take care of thyself, gentle Yahoo").

My design was, if possible, to discover some small island uninhabited, yet sufficient by my labor to furnish me with necessaries of life, which I would have thought a greater happiness than to be first minister in the politest court of Europe, so horrible was the idea I conceived of returning to live in the society and under the government of Yahoos. For in such a solitude as I desired, I could at least enjoy my own thoughts, and reflect with delight on the virtues of those inimitable Houyhnhnms, without any opportunity of degenerating into the vices and corruptions of my own species.

The reader may remember what I related when my crew conspired against me, and confined me to my cabin, how I continued there several weeks, without knowing what course we took; and when I was put ashore in the longboat, how the sailors told me with oaths, whether true or false, that they knew not in what part of the world we were. However, I did then believe us to be about 10 degrees southward of the Cape of Good Hope, or about 45 degrees southern latitude, as I gathered from some general words I overheard among them, being I supposed to the southeast in their intended voyage to Madagascar. And although this were but little better than conjecture, yet I resolved to steer my course eastward,

hoping to reach the southwest coast of New Holland, and perhaps some such island as I desired, lying westward of it. The wind was full west, and by six in the evening I computed I had gone eastward at least eighteen leagues; when I spied a very small island about half a league off, which I soon reached. It was nothing but a rock with one creek, naturally arched by the force of tempests. Here I put in my canoe, and climbing a part of the rock, I could plainly discover land to the east, extending from south to north. I lay all night in my canoe; and repeating my voyage early in the morning, I arrived in seven hours to the southeast point of New Holland. This confirmed me in the opinion I have long entertained, that the maps and charts place this country at least three degrees more to the east than it really is; which thought I communicated many years ago to my worthy friend Mr. Herman Moll,<sup>9</sup> and gave him my reasons for it, although he hath rather chosen to follow other authors.

I saw no inhabitants in the place where I landed; and being unarmed, I was afraid of venturing far into the country. I found some shellfish on the shore, and eat them raw, not daring to kindle a fire, for fear of being discovered by the natives. I continued three days feeding on oysters and limpets, to save my own provisions; and I fortunately found a brook of excellent water, which gave me great relief.

On the fourth day, venturing out early a little too far, I saw twenty or thirty natives upon a height, not above five hundred yards from me. They were stark naked, men, women, and children round a fire, as I could discover by the smoke. One of them spied me, and gave notice to the rest; five of them advanced towards me, leaving the women and children at the fire. I made what haste I could to the shore, and getting into my canoe, shoved off; the savages observing me retreat, ran after me; and before I could get far enough into the sea, discharged an arrow, which wounded me deeply on the inside of my left knee. (I shall carry the mark to my grave.) I apprehended the arrow might be poisoned; and paddling out of the reach of their darts (being a calm day) I made a shift to suck the wound, and dress it as well as I could.

I was at a loss what to do, for I durst not return to the same landing place, but stood to the north, and was forced to paddle; for the wind, although very gentle, was against me, blowing northwest. As I was looking about for a secure landing place, I saw a sail to the north northeast, which appearing every minute more visible, I was in some doubt whether I should wait for them or no; but at last my detestation of the Yahoo race prevailed; and turning my canoe, I sailed and paddled together to the south, and got into the same creek from whence I set out in the morning, choosing rather to trust myself among these barbarians than live with European Yahoos. I drew up my canoe as close as I could to the shore, and hid myself behind a stone by the little brook, which, as I have already said, was excellent water.

The ship came within half a league of this creek, and sent out her longboat with vessels to take in fresh water (for the place it seems was very well known), but I did not observe it until the boat was almost on shore; and it was too late to seek another hiding place. The seamen at their landing observed my canoe, and rummaging it all over, easily conjectured that the owner could not be far off. Four of them well armed searched every cranny and lurking hole, till at last they found me flat on my face behind the stone. They gazed a while in admiration at my strange uncouth dress; my coat made of skins, my wooden-soled shoes, and my furred stockings; from whence, however, they concluded I was not a native of the place, who all go naked. One of the seamen in Portuguese bid me rise, and asked who I was. I understood that language very well, and getting upon my feet, said I was a poor Yahoo, banished from the Houyhnhnms, and desired they would please to let me depart. They admired to hear me answer them in their own tongue, and saw by my complexion I must be an European; but were at a loss to know what I meant by Yahoos and Houyhnhnms, and at the same time fell a laughing at my strange tone in speaking, which resembled the neighing of a horse. I trembled all the while betwixt fear and hatred; I again desired leave to depart, and was gently moving to my canoe; but they laid hold on me, desiring to know what country I

was of? whence I came? with many other questions. I told them I was born in England, from whence I came about five years ago, and then their country and ours was at peace. I therefore hoped they would not treat me as an enemy, since I meant them no harm, but was a poor Yahoo, seeking some desolate place where to pass the remainder of his unfortunate life.

When they began to talk, I thought I never heard or saw any thing so unnatural; for it appeared to me as monstrous as if a dog or a cow should speak in England, or a Yahoo in Houyhnhnmland. The honest Portuguese were equally amazed at my strange dress, and the odd manner of delivering my words, which however they understood very well. They spoke to me with great humanity, and said they were sure their Captain would carry me *gratis* to Lisbon, from whence I might return to my own country; that two of the seamen would go back to the ship, to inform the Captain of what they had seen, and receive his orders; in the meantime, unless I would give my solemn oath not to fly, they would secure me by force. I thought it best to comply with their proposal. They were very curious to know my story, but I gave them very little satisfaction; and they all conjectured, that my misfortunes had impaired my reason. In two hours the boat, which went laden with vessels of water, returned with the Captain's commands to fetch me on board. I fell on my knees to preserve my liberty; but all was in vain, and the men having tied me with cords, heaved me into the boat, from whence I was taken into the ship, and from thence into the Captain's cabin.

His name was Pedro de Mendez; he was a very courteous and generous person; he entreated me to give some account of myself, and desired to know what I would eat or drink; said I should be used as well as himself, and spoke so many obliging things, that I wondered to find such civilities from a Yahoo. However, I remained silent and sullen; I was ready to faint at the very smell of him and his men. At last I desired something to eat out of my own canoe; but he ordered me a chicken and some excellent wine, and then directed that I should be put to bed in a very clean cabin. I would

not undress myself, but lay on the bedclothes; and in half an hour stole out, when I thought the crew was at dinner; and getting to the side of the ship, was going to leap into the sea, and swim for my life, rather than continue among Yahoos. But one of the seamen prevented me, and having informed the Captain, I was chained to my cabin.

After dinner Don Pedro came to me, and desired to know my reason for so desperate an attempt; assured me he only meant to do me all the service he was able; and spoke so very movingly, that at last I descended to treat him like an animal which had some little portion of reason. I gave him a very short relation of my voyage; of the conspiracy against me by my own men; of the country where they set me on shore, and of my five years residence there. All which he looked upon as if it were a dream or a vision; whereat I took great offense; for I had quite forgot the faculty of lying, so peculiar to Yahoos in all countries where they preside, and consequently the disposition of suspecting truth in others of their own species. I asked him whether it were the custom of his country to *say the thing that was not*? I assured him I had almost forgot what he meant by falsehood; and if I had lived a thousand years in Houyhnhnmland, I should never have heard a lie from the meanest servant. That I was altogether indifferent whether he believed me or no; but however, in return for his favors, I would give so much allowance to the corruption of his nature, as to answer any objection he would please to make; and he might easily discover the truth.

The Captain, a wise man, after many endeavors to catch me tripping in some part of my story, at last began to have a better opinion of my veracity. But he added that since I professed so inviolable an attachment to truth, I must give him my word of honor to bear him company in this voyage without attempting anything against my life; or else he would continue me a prisoner till we arrived at Lisbon. I gave him the promise he required; but at the same time protested that I would suffer the greatest hardships rather than return to live among Yahoos.



Our voyage passed without any considerable accident. In gratitude to the Captain I sometimes sat with him at his earnest request, and strove to conceal my antipathy against humankind, although it often broke out; which he suffered to pass without observation. But the greatest part of the day, I confined myself to my cabin, to avoid seeing any of the crew. The Captain had often entreated me to strip myself of my savage dress, and offered to lend me the best suit of clothes he had. This I would not be prevailed on to accept, abhorring to cover myself with anything that had been on the back of a Yahoo. I only desired he would lend me two clean shirts, which having been washed since he wore them, I believed would not so much defile me. These I changed every second day, and washed them myself.

We arrived at Lisbon, Nov. 5, 1715. At our landing, the Captain forced me to cover myself with his cloak, to prevent the rabble from crowding about me. I was conveyed to his own house; and at my earnest request, he led me up to the highest room backwards.<sup>1</sup> I conjured him to conceal from all persons what I had told him of the Houyhnhnms; because the least hint of such a story would not only draw numbers of people to see me, but probably put me in danger of being imprisoned, or burned by the Inquisition. The Captain persuaded me to accept a suit of clothes newly made; but I would not suffer the tailor to take my measure; however, Don Pedro being almost of my size, they fitted me well enough. He accoutered me with other necessaries, all new, which I aired for twenty-four hours before I would use them.

The Captain had no wife, nor above three servants, none of which were suffered to attend at meals; and his whole deportment was so obliging, added to very good human understanding, that I really began to tolerate his company. He gained so far upon me, that I ventured to look out of the back window. By degrees I was brought into another room, from whence I peeped into the street, but drew my head back in a fright. In a week's time he seduced me down to the door. I found my terror gradually lessened, but my hatred and contempt seemed to increase. I was at last bold enough to walk the

street in his company, but kept my nose well stopped with rue, or sometimes with tobacco.

In ten days, Don Pedro, to whom I had given some account of my domestic affairs, put it upon me as a point of honor and conscience that I ought to return to my native country, and live at home with my wife and children. He told me there was an English ship in the port just ready to sail, and he would furnish me with all things necessary. It would be tedious to repeat his arguments, and my contradictions. He said it was altogether impossible to find such a solitary island as I had desired to live in; but I might command in my own house, and pass my time in a manner as recluse as I pleased.

I complied at last, finding I could not do better. I left Lisbon the 24th day of November, in an English merchantman, but who was the Master I never inquired. Don Pedro accompanied me to the ship, and lent me twenty pounds. He took kind leave of me, and embraced me at parting; which I bore as well as I could. During this last voyage I had no commerce with the Master, or any of his men; but pretending I was sick kept close in my cabin. On the fifth of December, 1715, we cast anchor in the Downs about nine in the morning, and at three in the afternoon I got safe to my house at Redriff.

My wife and family received me with great surprise and joy, because they concluded me certainly dead; but I must freely confess, the sight of them filled me only with hatred, disgust, and contempt; and the more, by reflecting on the near alliance I had to them. For although since my unfortunate exile from the Houyhnhnm country, I had compelled myself to tolerate the sight of Yahoos, and to converse with Don Pedro de Mendez; yet my memory and imaginations were perpetually filled with the virtues and ideas of those exalted Houyhnhnms. And when I began to consider that by copulating with one of the Yahoo species, I had become a parent of more, it struck me with the utmost shame, confusion, and horror.

As soon as I entered the house, my wife took me in her arms, and kissed me; at which, having not been used to the touch of that odious animal for so many years, I fell in a swoon for almost an

hour. At the time I am writing, it is five years since my last return to England. During the first year I could not endure my wife or children in my presence, the very smell of them was intolerable; much less could I suffer them to eat in the same room. To this hour they dare not presume to touch my bread, or drink out of the same cup; neither was I ever able to let one of them take me by the hand. The first money I laid out was to buy two young stone-horses,<sup>2</sup> which I keep in a good stable, and next to them the groom is my greatest favorite; for I feel my spirits revived by the smell he contracts in the stable. My horses understand me tolerably well; I converse with them at least four hours every day. They are strangers to bridle or saddle; they live in great amity with me, and friendship to each other.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: That is, 1715, by modern dating. The year began on March 25.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A famous contemporary map maker.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: At the rear.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Stallions.[Return to reference 2](#)

CHAPTER 12. *The Author's veracity. His design in publishing this work. His censure of those travelers who swerve from the truth. The Author clears himself from any sinister ends in writing. His native country commended. The right of the crown to those countries described by the Author is justified. The difficulty of conquering them. The Author takes his last leave of the reader; proposeth his manner of living for the future; gives good advice, and concludeth.*

Thus gentle reader, I have given thee a faithful history of my travels for sixteen years, and above seven months; wherein I have not been so studious of ornament as of truth. I could perhaps like others have astonished thee with strange improbable tales; but I rather chose to relate plain matter of fact in the simplest manner and style; because my principal design was to inform, and not to amuse thee.

It is easy for us who travel into remote countries, which are seldom visited by Englishmen or other Europeans, to form descriptions of wonderful animals both at sea and land. Whereas a traveler's chief aim should be to make men wiser and better, and to improve their minds by the bad as well as good example of what they deliver concerning foreign places.

I could heartily wish a law were enacted, that every traveler, before he were permitted to publish his voyages, should be obliged to make oath before the Lord High Chancellor that all he intended to print was absolutely true to the best of his knowledge; for then the world would no longer be deceived as it usually is, while some writers, to make their works pass the better upon the public, impose the grossest falsities on the unwary reader. I have perused several books of travels with great delight in my younger days; but, having since gone over most parts of the globe, and been able to contradict many fabulous accounts from my own observation, it hath given me a great disgust against this part of reading, and some indignation to see the credulity of mankind so impudently abused. Therefore, since my acquaintance were pleased to think my poor endeavors might not be unacceptable to my country, I imposed on myself as a

maxim, never to be swerved from, that I would *strictly adhere to truth*; neither indeed can I be ever under the least temptation to vary from it, while I retain in my mind the lectures and example of my noble master, and the other illustrious Houyhnhnms, of whom I had so long the honor to be an humble hearer.

—*Nec si miserum Fortuna Sinonem  
Finxit, vanum etiam, mendacemque improba finget.*<sup>3</sup>

I know very well how little reputation is to be got by writings which require neither genius nor learning, nor indeed any other talent, except a good memory, or an exact journal. I know likewise, that writers of travels, like dictionary-makers, are sunk into oblivion by the weight and bulk of those who come last, and therefore lie uppermost. And it is highly probable that such travelers who shall hereafter visit the countries described in this work of mine, may be detecting my errors (if there be any) and adding many new discoveries of their own, jostle me out of vogue, and stand in my place, making the world forget that ever I was an author. This indeed would be too great a mortification if I wrote for fame; but, as my sole intention was the PUBLIC GOOD, I cannot be altogether disappointed. For, who can read the virtues I have mentioned in the glorious Houyhnhnms, without being ashamed of his own vices, when he considers himself as the reasoning, governing animal of his country? I shall say nothing of those remote nations where Yahoos preside; amongst which the least corrupted are the Brobdingnagians, whose wise maxims in morality and government it would be our happiness to observe. But I forbear descanting further, and rather leave the judicious reader to his own remarks and applications.

I am not a little pleased that this work of mine can possibly meet with no censurers; for what objections can be made against a writer who relates only plain facts that happened in such distant countries, where we have not the least interest with respect either to trade or negotiations? I have carefully avoided every fault with which

common writers of travels are often too justly charged. Besides, I meddle not the least with any party, but write without passion, prejudice, or ill-will against any man or number of men whatsoever. I write for the noblest end, to inform and instruct mankind, over whom I may, without breach of modesty, pretend to some superiority, from the advantages I received by conversing so long among the most accomplished Houyhnhnms. I write without any view towards profit or praise. I never suffer a word to pass that may look like a reflection,<sup>4</sup> or possibly give the least offense even to those who are most ready to take it. So that, I hope, I may with justice pronounce myself an Author perfectly blameless; against whom the tribes of answerers, considerers, observers, reflectors, detectors, remarkers will never be able to find matter for exercising their talents.

I confess it was whispered to me that I was bound in duty as a subject of England, to have given in a memorial<sup>5</sup> to a secretary of state, at my first coming over; because, whatever lands are discovered by a subject, belong to the Crown. But I doubt whether our conquests in the countries I treat of would be as easy as those of Ferdinando Cortez over the naked Americans. The Lilliputians, I think, are hardly worth the charge of a fleet and army to reduce them; and I question whether it might be prudent or safe to attempt the Brobdingnagians; or, whether an English army would be much at their ease with the Flying Island over their heads. The Houyhnhnms, indeed, appear not to be so well prepared for war, a science to which they are perfect strangers, and especially against missive weapons. However, supposing myself to be a minister of state, I could never give my advice for invading them. Their prudence, unanimity, unacquaintedness with fear, and their love of their country would amply supply all defects in the military art. Imagine twenty thousand of them breaking into the midst of an European army, confounding the ranks, overturning the carriages, battering the warriors' faces into mummy, by terrible yerks from their hinder hoofs: for they would well deserve the character given to Augustus, *Recalcitrat undique tutus*.<sup>6</sup> But instead of proposals for conquering

that magnanimous nation, I rather wish they were in a capacity or disposition to send a sufficient number of their inhabitants for civilizing Europe; by teaching us the first principles of Honor, Justice, Truth, Temperance, Public Spirit, Fortitude, Chastity, Friendship, Benevolence, and Fidelity. The names of all which virtues are still retained among us in most languages, and are to be met with in modern as well as ancient authors, which I am able to assert from my own small reading.

But I had another reason which made me less forward to enlarge his majesty's dominions by my discoveries: to say the truth, I had conceived a few scruples with relation to the distributive justice of princes upon those occasions. For instance, a crew of pirates are driven by a storm they know not whither; at length a boy discovers land from the topmast; they go on shore to rob and plunder; they see an harmless people, are entertained with kindness, they give the country a new name, they take formal possession of it for the king, they set up a rotten plank or a stone for a memorial, they murder two or three dozen of the natives, bring away a couple more by force for a sample, return home, and get their pardon. Here commences a new dominion acquired with a title by Divine Right. Ships are sent with the first opportunity; the natives driven out or destroyed, their princes tortured to discover their gold; a free license given to all acts of inhumanity and lust; the earth reeking with the blood of its inhabitants: and this execrable crew of butchers employed in so pious an expedition is a *modern colony* sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous people.

But this description, I confess, doth by no means affect the British nation, who may be an example to the whole world for their wisdom, care, and justice in planting colonies; their liberal endowments for the advancement of religion and learning; their choice of devout and able pastors to propagate Christianity; their caution in stocking their provinces with people of sober lives and conversations from this the Mother Kingdom; their strict regard to the distribution of justice, in supplying the civil administration through all their colonies with officers of the greatest abilities, utter

strangers to corruption: and to crown all, by sending the most vigilant and virtuous governors, who have no other views than the happiness of the people over whom they preside, and the honor of the king their master.

But, as those countries which I have described do not appear to have any desire of being conquered, and enslaved, murdered, or driven out by colonies, nor abound either in gold, silver, sugar, or tobacco, I did humbly conceive they were by no means proper objects of our zeal, our valor, or our interest. However, if those whom it may concern, think fit to be of another opinion, I am ready to depose, when I shall be lawfully called, that no European did ever visit these countries before me. I mean, if the inhabitants ought to be believed.

But, as to the formality of taking possession in my sovereign's name, it never came once into my thoughts; and if it had, yet as my affairs then stood, I should perhaps in point of prudence and self-preservation have put it off to a better opportunity.

Having thus answered the only objection that can be raised against me as a traveler, I here take a final leave of my courteous readers, and return to enjoy my own speculations in my little garden at Redriff; to apply those excellent lessons of virtue which I learned among the Houyhnhnms; to instruct the Yahoos of my own family as far as I shall find them docible animals; to behold my figure often in a glass, and thus if possible habituate myself by time to tolerate the sight of a human creature; to lament the brutality of Houyhnhnms in my own country, but always treat their persons with respect, for the sake of my noble master, his family, his friends, and the whole Houyhnhnm race, whom these of ours have the honor to resemble in all their lineaments, however their intellectuals came to degenerate.

I began last week to permit my wife to sit at dinner with me, at the farthest end of a long table; and to answer (but with the utmost brevity) the few questions I ask her. Yet the smell of a Yahoo continuing very offensive, I always keep my nose well stopped with rue, lavender, or tobacco leaves. And although it be hard for a man late in life to remove old habits, I am not altogether out of hopes in



some time to suffer a neighbor Yahoo in my company, without the apprehensions I am yet under of his teeth or his claws.

My reconciliation to the Yahoo kind in general might not be so difficult, if they would be content with those vices and follies only which nature hath entitled them to. I am not in the least provoked at the sight of a lawyer, a pickpocket, a colonel, a fool, a lord, a gamester, a politician, a whoremonger, a physician, an evidence,<sup>2</sup> a suborner, an attorney, a traitor, or the like: this is all according to the due course of things. But when I behold a lump of deformity, and diseases both in body and mind, smitten with *pride*, it immediately breaks all the measures of my patience; neither shall I be ever able to comprehend how such an animal and such a vice could tally together. The wise and virtuous Houyhnhnms, who abound in all excellencies that can adorn a rational creature, have no name for this vice in their language, which hath no terms to express anything that is evil, except those whereby they describe the detestable qualities of their Yahoos, among which they were not able to distinguish this of pride, for want of thoroughly understanding human nature, as it showeth itself in other countries, where that animal presides. But I, who had more experience, could plainly observe some rudiments of it among the wild Yahoos.

But the Houyhnhnms, who live under the government of reason, are no more proud of the good qualities they possess, than I should be for not wanting a leg or an arm, which no man in his wits would boast of, although he must be miserable without them. I dwell the longer upon this subject from the desire I have to make the society of an English Yahoo by any means not insupportable; and therefore I here entreat those who have any tincture of this absurd vice, that they will not presume to appear in my sight.

## Endnotes

1726, 1735

- Note 3: Nor if Fortune had molded Sinon for misery, will she also in spite mold him as false and lying (Latin; Virgil's *Aeneid* 2.79–80). [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Censure, criticism.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Statement of facts for government use.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: He kicks backward, at every point on his guard (Latin; Horace's *Satires* 2.1.20). "Mummy": pulp. "Yerks": kicks.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Witness.[Return to reference 7](#)

# A Modest Proposal<sup>1</sup>

## FOR PREVENTING THE CHILDREN OF POOR PEOPLE IN IRELAND FROM BEING A BURDEN TO THEIR PARENTS OR COUNTRY, AND FOR MAKING THEM BENEFICIAL TO THE PUBLIC

It is a melancholy object to those who walk through this great town<sup>2</sup> or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin doors, crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags and importuning every passenger for an alms. These mothers, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling to beg sustenance for their helpless infants, who, as they grow up, either turn thieves for want of work, or leave their dear native country to fight for the Pretender in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbadoes.<sup>3</sup>

I think it is agreed by all parties that this prodigious number of children in the arms, or on the backs, or at the heels of their mothers, and frequently of their fathers, is in the present deplorable state of the kingdom a very great additional grievance; and therefore whoever could find out a fair, cheap, and easy method of making these children sound, useful members of the commonwealth would deserve so well of the public as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation.

But my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children of professed beggars; it is of a much greater extent, and shall take in the whole number of infants at a certain age who are born of parents in effect as little able to support them as those who demand our charity in the streets.

As to my own part, having turned my thoughts for many years upon this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of other projectors,<sup>4</sup> I have always found them grossly

mistaken in their computation. It is true, a child just dropped from its dam may be supported by her milk for a solar year, with little other nourishment; at most not above the value of two shillings, which the mother may certainly get, or the value in scraps, by her lawful occupation of begging; and it is exactly at one year old that I propose to provide for them in such a manner as instead of being a charge upon their parents or the parish, or wanting food and raiment for the rest of their lives, they shall on the contrary contribute to the feeding, and partly to the clothing, of many thousands.

There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent those voluntary abortions, and that horrid practice of women murdering their bastard children, alas, too frequent among us, sacrificing the poor innocent babes, I doubt, more to avoid the expense than the shame, which would move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman breast.

The number of souls in this kingdom<sup>5</sup> being usually reckoned one million and a half, of these I calculate there may be about two hundred thousand couple whose wives are breeders; from which number I subtract thirty thousand couples who are able to maintain their own children, although I apprehend there cannot be so many under the present distresses of the kingdom; but this being granted, there will remain an hundred and seventy thousand breeders. I again subtract fifty thousand for those women who miscarry, or whose children die by accident or disease within the year. There only remain an hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born. The question therefore is, how this number shall be reared and provided for, which, as I have already said, under the present situation of affairs, is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto proposed. For we can neither employ them in handicraft or agriculture; we neither build houses (I mean in the country) nor cultivate land. They can very seldom pick up a livelihood by stealing till they arrive at six years old, except where they are of towardly parts;<sup>6</sup> although I confess they learn the rudiments much earlier, during which time they can however be looked upon only as

probationers, as I have been informed by a principal gentleman in the county of Cavan, who protested to me that he never knew above one or two instances under the ages of six, even in a part of the kingdom so renowned for the quickest proficiency in that art.

I am assured by our merchants that a boy or a girl before twelve years old is no salable commodity; and even when they come to this age they will not yield above three pounds, or three pounds and half a crown at most on the Exchange; which cannot turn to account either to the parents or the kingdom, the charge of nutriment and rags having been at least four times that value.

I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout.<sup>2</sup>

I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one fourth part to be males, which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine; and my reason is that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages, therefore one male will be sufficient to serve four females. That the remaining hundred thousand may at a year old be offered in sale to the persons of quality and fortune through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends; and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.

I have reckoned upon a medium that a child just born will weigh twelve pounds, and in a solar year if tolerably nursed increaseth to twenty-eight pounds.

I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

Infant's flesh will be in season throughout the year, but more plentiful in March, and a little before and after. For we are told by a grave author, an eminent French physician,<sup>8</sup> that fish being a prolific diet, there are more children born in Roman Catholic countries about nine months after Lent than at any other season; therefore, reckoning a year after Lent, the markets will be more glutted than usual, because the number of popish infants is at least three to one in this kingdom; and therefore it will have one other collateral advantage, by lessening the number of Papists among us.

I have already computed the charge of nursing a beggar's child (in which list I reckon all cottagers, laborers, and four fifths of the farmers) to be about two shillings per annum, rags included; and I believe no gentleman would repine to give ten shillings for the carcass of a good fat child, which, as I have said, will make four dishes of excellent nutritive meat, when he hath only some particular friend or his own family to dine with him. Thus the squire will learn to be a good landlord, and grow popular among the tenants; the mother will have eight shillings net profit, and be fit for the work till she produces another child.

Those who are more thrifty (as I must confess the times require) may flay the carcass; the skin of which artificially<sup>9</sup> dressed will make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen.

As to our city of Dublin, shambles<sup>1</sup> may be appointed for this purpose in the most convenient parts of it, and butchers we may be assured will not be wanting; although I rather recommend buying the children alive, and dressing them hot from the knife as we do roasting pigs.

A very worthy person, a true lover of his country, and whose virtues I highly esteem, was lately pleased in discoursing on this matter to offer a refinement upon my scheme. He said that many gentlemen of this kingdom, having of late destroyed their deer, he conceived that the want of venison might be well supplied by the

bodies of young lads and maidens, not exceeding fourteen years of age nor under twelve, so great a number of both sexes in every county being now ready to starve for want of work and service; and these to be disposed of by their parents, if alive, or otherwise by their nearest relations. But with due deference to so excellent a friend and so deserving a patriot, I cannot be altogether in his sentiments; for as to the males, my American acquaintance assured me from frequent experience that their flesh was generally tough and lean, like that of our schoolboys, by continual exercise, and their taste disagreeable; and to fatten them would not answer the charge. Then as to the females, it would, I think with humble submission, be a loss to the public, because they soon would become breeders themselves; and besides, it is not improbable that some scrupulous people might be apt to censure such a practice (although indeed very unjustly) as a little bordering upon cruelty; which I confess, hath always been with me the strongest objection against any project, how well soever intended.

But in order to justify my friend, he confessed that this expedient was put into his head by the famous Psalmanazar,<sup>2</sup> a native of the island Formosa, who came from thence to London above twenty years ago, and in conversation told my friend that in his country when any young person happened to be put to death, the executioner sold the carcass to persons of quality as a prime dainty; and that in his time the body of a plump girl of fifteen, who was crucified for an attempt to poison the emperor, was sold to his Imperial Majesty's prime minister of state, and other great mandarins of the court, in joints from the gibbet, at four hundred crowns. Neither indeed can I deny that if the same use were made of several plump young girls in this town, who without one single groat to their fortunes cannot stir abroad without a chair, and appear at the playhouse and assemblies in foreign fineries which they never will pay for, the kingdom would not be the worse.

Some persons of a desponding spirit are in great concern about that vast number of poor people who are aged, diseased, or maimed, and I have been desired to employ my thoughts what

course may be taken to ease the nation of so grievous an encumbrance. But I am not in the least pain upon that matter, because it is very well known that they are every day dying and rotting by cold and famine, and filth and vermin, as fast as can be reasonably expected. And as to the younger laborers, they are now in almost as hopeful a condition. They cannot get work, and consequently pine away for want of nourishment to a degree that if at any time they are accidentally hired to common labor, they have not strength to perform it; and thus the country and themselves are happily delivered from the evils to come.

I have too long digressed, and therefore shall return to my subject. I think the advantages by the proposal which I have made are obvious and many, as well as of the highest importance.

For first, as I have already observed, it would greatly lessen the number of Papists, with whom we are yearly overrun, being the principal breeders of the nation as well as our most dangerous enemies; and who stay at home on purpose to deliver the kingdom to the Pretender, hoping to take their advantage by the absence of so many good Protestants, who have chosen rather to leave their country than stay at home and pay tithes against their conscience to an Episcopal curate.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, the poorer tenants will have something valuable of their own, which by law may be made liable to distress,<sup>4</sup> and help to pay their landlord's rent, their corn and cattle being already seized and money a thing unknown.

Thirdly, whereas the maintenance of an hundred thousand children, from two years old and upwards, cannot be computed at less than ten shillings a piece per annum, the nation's stock will be thereby increased fifty thousand pounds per annum, besides the profit of a new dish introduced to the tables of all gentlemen of fortune in the kingdom who have any refinement in taste. And the money will circulate among ourselves, the goods being entirely of our own growth and manufacture.

Fourthly, the constant breeders, besides the gain of eight shillings sterling per annum by the sale of their children, will be rid of the



charge of maintaining them after the first year.

Fifthly, this food would likewise bring great custom to taverns, where the vintners will certainly be so prudent as to procure the best receipts<sup>5</sup> for dressing it to perfection, and consequently have their houses frequented by all the fine gentlemen, who justly value themselves upon their knowledge in good eating; and a skillful cook, who understands how to oblige his guests, will contrive to make it as expensive as they please.

Sixthly, this would be a great inducement to marriage, which all wise nations have either encouraged by rewards or enforced by laws and penalties. It would increase the care and tenderness of mothers toward their children, when they were sure of a settlement for life to the poor babes, provided in some sort by the public, to their annual profit instead of expense. We should see an honest emulation among the married women, which of them could bring the fattest child to the market. Men would become as fond of their wives during the time of their pregnancy as they are now of their mares in foal, their cows in calf, or sows when they are ready to farrow; nor offer to beat or kick them (as is too frequent a practice) for fear of a miscarriage.

Many other advantages might be enumerated. For instance, the addition of some thousand carcasses in our exportation of barreled beef, the propagation of swine's flesh, and improvement in the art of making good bacon, so much wanted among us by the great destruction of pigs, too frequent at our tables, which are no way comparable in taste or magnificence to a well-grown, fat, yearling child, which roasted whole will make a considerable figure at a lord mayor's feast or any other public entertainment. But this and many others I omit, being studious of brevity.

Supposing that one thousand families in this city would be constant customers for infants' flesh, besides others who might have it at merry meetings, particularly weddings and christenings, I compute that Dublin would take off annually about twenty thousand carcasses, and the rest of the kingdom (where probably they will be sold somewhat cheaper) the remaining eighty thousand.

I can think of no one objection that will probably be raised against this proposal, unless it should be urged that the number of people will be thereby much lessened in the kingdom. This I freely own, and it was indeed one principal design in offering it to the world. I desire the reader will observe, that I calculate my remedy for this one individual kingdom of Ireland and for no other that ever was, is, or I think ever can be upon earth. Therefore let no man talk to me of other expedients: of taxing our absentees at five shillings a pound: of using neither clothes nor household furniture except what is of our own growth and manufacture: of utterly rejecting the materials and instruments that promote foreign luxury: of curing the expensiveness of pride, vanity, idleness, and gaming in our women: of introducing a vein of parsimony, prudence, and temperance: of learning to love our country, in the want of which we differ even from Laplanders and the inhabitants of Topinamboo:<sup>6</sup> of quitting our animosities and factions, nor acting any longer like the Jews, who were murdering one another at the very moment their city was taken:<sup>7</sup> of being a little cautious not to sell our country and conscience for nothing: of teaching landlords to have at least one degree of mercy toward their tenants: lastly, of putting a spirit of honesty, industry, and skill into our shopkeepers; who, if a resolution could now be taken to buy only our native goods, would immediately unite to cheat and exact upon us in the price, the measure, and the goodness, nor could ever yet be brought to make one fair proposal of just dealing, though often and earnestly invited to it.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore I repeat, let no man talk to me of these and the like expedients, till he hath at least some glimpse of hope that there will ever be some hearty and sincere attempt to put them in practice.

But as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal, which, as it is wholly new, so it hath something solid and real, of no expense and little trouble, full in our own power, and whereby we can incur no danger in disobliging England. For this kind of commodity will not bear exportation, the flesh being of too tender a consistence to

admit a long continuance in salt, although perhaps I could name a country which would be glad to eat up our whole nation without it.<sup>9</sup>

After all, I am not so violently bent upon my own opinion as to reject any offer proposed by wise men, which shall be found equally innocent, cheap, easy, and effectual. But before something of that kind shall be advanced in contradiction to my scheme, and offering a better, I desire the author or authors will be pleased maturely to consider two points. First, as things now stand, how they will be able to find food and raiment for an hundred thousand useless mouths and backs. And secondly, there being a round million of creatures in human figure throughout this kingdom, whose sole subsistence put into a common stock would leave them in debt two millions of pounds sterling, adding those who are beggars by profession to the bulk of farmers, cottagers, and laborers, with their wives and children who are beggars in effect; I desire those politicians who dislike my overture, and may perhaps be so bold to attempt an answer, that they will first ask the parents of these mortals whether they would not at this day think it a great happiness to have been sold for food at a year old in the manner I prescribe, and thereby have avoided such a perpetual sense of misfortunes as they have since gone through by the oppression of landlords, the impossibility of paying rent without money or trade, the want of common sustenance, with neither house nor clothes to cover them from the inclemencies of the weather, and the most inevitable prospect of entailing the like or greater miseries upon their breed forever.

I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the public good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children by which I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past childbearing.

- Note 1:  
 “A Modest Proposal” is an example of Swift’s favorite satiric devices used with superb effect. Irony (from the deceptive adjective *modest* in the title to the very last sentence) pervades the piece. A rigorous logic deduces ghastly arguments from a premise so quietly assumed that readers assent before they are aware of what that assent implies. Parody, at which Swift is adept, allows him to glance sardonically at the by then familiar figure of the benevolent humanitarian (forerunner of the modern sociologist, social worker, and economic planner) concerned to correct a social evil by means of a theoretically conceived plan. The proposer, as naive as he is apparently logical and kindly, ignores and therefore emphasizes for the reader the enormity of his plan. The whole is an elaboration of a rather trite metaphor: “The English are devouring the Irish.” But there is nothing trite about the pamphlet, which expresses in Swift’s most controlled style his revulsion at the contemporary state of Ireland and his indignation at the rapacious English absentee landlords, who were bleeding the country white with the silent approbation of Parliament, ministers, and the crown.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dublin.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: James Francis Edward Stuart (1688–1766), the son of James II, was claimant (“Pretender”) to the throne of England from which the Glorious Revolution had barred his succession. Catholic Ireland was loyal to him, and Irishmen joined him in his exile on the Continent. Because of the poverty in Ireland, many Irish emigrated to the West Indies and other British colonies in America; they paid their passage by binding themselves to work for a stated period for one of the planters.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Devisers of schemes.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ireland.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Promising abilities.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A highly seasoned meat stew.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: François Rabelais (ca. 1494–1553), a humorist and satirist, by no means grave.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Skillfully.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Slaughterhouses.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: George Psalmanazar (ca. 1679–1763), a famous impostor. A Frenchman, he imposed himself on English bishops, noblemen, and scientists as a Formosan. He wrote an entirely fictitious account of Formosa, in which he described human sacrifices and cannibalism.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Ireland had many Protestant sectarians who did not support the “Episcopal” (Anglican) Church of Ireland.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Distraint, that is, the seizing, through legal action, of property for the payment of debts and other obligations. “Corn”: grain.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Recipes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, even Laplanders love their frozen, infertile country and the tribes of Brazil love their jungle more than the Anglo-Irish love Ireland.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: During the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman Titus (later emperor), who captured and destroyed the city in 70 C.E., bloody fights broke out between fanatical factions among the defenders.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Swift himself had made all these proposals in various pamphlets. In editions printed during his lifetime the various proposals were italicized to indicate Swift’s support for them.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: England.[Return to reference 9](#)

# ALEXANDER POPE

## 1688–1744

Alexander Pope is the only important writer of his generation who was solely a man of letters. Because he could not, as a Roman Catholic, attend a university, vote, or hold public office, he was excluded from the sort of patronage that was bestowed by statesmen on many writers during the reign of Anne. This disadvantage he turned into a positive good, for the translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which he undertook for profit as well as for fame, gave him ample means to live the life of an independent suburban gentleman. After 1718 he lived hospitably in his villa by the Thames at Twickenham (then pronounced *Twit'nam*), entertaining his friends and converting his five acres of land into a diminutive landscape garden. Almost exactly a century earlier, William Shakespeare had earned enough to retire to a country estate at Stratford—but he had been an actor-manager as well as a playwright; Pope was the first English writer to build a lucrative, lifelong career by publishing his works.

Ill health plagued Pope almost from birth. Disabled when young by tuberculosis of the bone, he never grew taller than four and a half feet. In later life he suffered from violent headaches and required constant attention from servants. But Pope did not allow his infirmities to hold him back; he was always a master at making the best of what he had. Around 1700 his father, a well-to-do, retired London merchant, moved to a small property at Binfield in Windsor

Forest. There, in rural surroundings, young Pope completed his education by reading whatever he pleased, "like a boy gathering flowers in the woods and fields just as they fall in his way"; and there, encouraged by his father, he began to write verse. He was already an accomplished poet in his teens; no English poet has ever been more precocious.

Pope's first striking success as a poet was *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), which brought him Joseph Addison's approval and an intemperate personal attack from the critic John Dennis, who was angered by a casual reference to himself in the poem. *The Rape of the Lock*, both in its original shorter version of 1712 and in its more elaborate version of 1714, proved the author a master not only of metrics and of language but also of witty, urbane satire. In *An Essay on Criticism*, Pope had excelled all his predecessors in writing a didactic poem after the example of Horace; in the *Rape*, he had written the most brilliant mock-epic in the language. But there was another vein in Pope's youthful poetry, a tender concern with natural beauty and love. The *Pastorals* (1709), his first publication, and *Windsor-Forest* (1713; much of it was written earlier) abound in visual imagery and descriptive passages of ideally ordered nature; they remind us that Pope was an amateur painter. The "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady" and *Eloisa to Abelard*, published in the collected poems of 1717, dwell on the pangs of unhappy lovers (Pope himself never married). And even the long task of translating Homer, the "dull duty" of editing Shakespeare, and, in middle age, his dedication to ethical and satirical poetry did not make less fine his keen sense of beauty in nature and art.

Pope's early poetry brought him to the attention of the literary world, as he mingled in London coffeehouses and taverns frequented by writers, where he liked to play the rake. Between 1706 and 1711 he came to know, among many others, William Congreve; William Walsh, the critic and poet; and Richard Steele and Joseph Addison. As it happened, all were Whigs. Pope could readily ignore politics in the excitement of taking his place among the leading wits of the town. But after the fall of the Whigs in 1710 and

the formation of the Tory government under Robert Harley (later the Earl of Oxford) and Henry St. John (later Viscount Bolingbroke), party loyalties bred bitterness among the wits as among the politicians. By 1712, Pope had made the acquaintance of another group of writers, all Tories, who were soon his intimate friends: Jonathan Swift, by then the close associate of Harley and St. John and the principal propagandist for their policies; Dr. John Arbuthnot, physician to the queen, a learned scientist, a wit, and a man of humanity and integrity; John Gay, the poet, who in 1728 was to create *The Beggar's Opera*, the greatest theatrical success of the century; and the poet Thomas Parnell. Through them he became the friend and admirer of Oxford and later the intimate of Bolingbroke. In 1714 this group, at the instigation of Pope, formed a club for satirizing all sorts of false learning. The friends proposed to write jointly the biography of a learned fool whom they named Martinus Scriblerus (Martin the Scribbler), whose life and opinions would be a running commentary on educated nonsense. Some amusing episodes were later rewritten and published as the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* (1741). The real importance of the club, however, is that it fostered a satiric temper that would be expressed in such mature works of the friends as *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Beggar's Opera*, and *The Dunciad*.

"The life of a wit is a warfare on earth," said Pope, generalizing from his own experience. His very success as a poet (and his astonishing precocity brought him success very early) made enemies who were to plague him in pamphlets, verse satires, and squibs in the journals throughout his entire literary career. He was attacked for his writings, his religion, and his physical deformity. Although he smarted under the jibes of his detractors, he was a fighter who struck back, always giving better than he got. Pope's literary warfare began in 1713, when he announced his intention of translating the *Iliad* and sought subscribers to a deluxe edition of the work. Subscribers came in droves, but the Whig writers who surrounded Addison at Button's Coffee House did all they could to discredit the venture. The eventual success of the first published installment of



his *Iliad* in 1715 did not obliterate Pope's resentment against Addison and his "little senate"; and he took his revenge in the damaging portrait of Addison (under the name of Atticus), which was later included in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735), lines 193–214. The not unjustified attacks on Pope's edition of Shakespeare (1725) by the learned Shakespeare scholar Lewis Theobald (Pope always spelled and pronounced the name "Tibbald" in his satires) led to Theobald's appearance as king of the dunces in *The Dunciad* (1728). In this impressive poem Pope stigmatized his literary enemies as agents of all that he disliked and feared in the tendencies of his time—the vulgarization of taste and the arts consequent on the rapid growth of the reading public and the development of journalism, magazines, and other popular and cheap publications, which spread scandal, sensationalism, and political partisanship—in short the new commercial spirit of the nation that was corrupting not only the arts but, as Pope saw it, the national life itself.

In the 1730s Pope moved on to philosophical, ethical, and political subjects in *An Essay on Man*, the *Epistles to Several Persons*, and the *Imitations of Horace*. The reigns of George I and George II appeared to him, as to Swift and other Tories, a period of rapid moral, political, and cultural deterioration. The agents of decay fed on the rise of moneyed (as opposed to landed) wealth, which accounted for the political corruption encouraged by Sir Robert Walpole and the court party and the corruption of all aspects of the national life by a vulgar class of *nouveaux riches*. Pope assumed the role of the champion of traditional values: of right reason, humanistic learning, sound art, good taste, and public virtue. His enemies, he insisted, happened to illustrate various degrees of unreason, pedantry, bad art, vulgar taste, and at best, indifferent morals.

The satirist traditionally deals in generally prevalent evils and generally observable human types, not with particular individuals. So too with Pope; the bulk of his satire can be read and enjoyed without much biographical information. Usually he used fictional or

type names, although he most often had an individual in mind—Sappho, Atossa, Atticus, Sporus—and when he named individuals (as he consistently did in *The Dunciad*), his purpose was to raise his victims to emblems of folly and vice. To judge and censure the age, Pope also created the *I* of the satires (not identical with Alexander Pope of Twickenham). This semifictional figure is the detached observer, somewhat removed from the city, town, and court, the centers of corruption; he is the friend of the virtuous, whose friendship for him testifies to his integrity; he is fond of peace, country life, the arts, morality, and truth; and he detests their opposites that flourish in the great world. In such an age, Pope implies, it is impossible for such a man—honest, truthful, blunt—not to write satire.

Pope was a master of style. From first to last, his verse is notable for its rhythmic variety, despite the apparently rigid metrical unit—the heroic couplet—in which he wrote; for the precision of meaning and the harmony (or expressive disharmony) of his language; and for the union of maximum conciseness with maximum complexity. The passages as marked below suggest how the subtle metrical effects of Pope's verse spring from the page, inviting us to embody them vocally in a living, dramatic reading. The first, lines 71–76 of the pastoral poem "Summer" (1709), is so lyrical that composer George Frideric Handel used it in his operatic entertainment *Semele* (1744). Accents mark where the rhetorical stress departs from normal iambic rhythm, often because of the slight emphasis to be given to "you," Summer, the addressee, on the off beat. Strong pauses inside the lines are marked with double bars, alliteration and assonance by italics.

Óh déígn to visit our *forsaken seats*,  
The mossy *fountains* || and the *green retreats*!  
Where'er yóu wálk || cóol *gáles* shall *fan* the *glade*,  
Trées whére yóu síť || shall crowd into a shade:

Where'er yóu t' read || the blushing *flowers* shall  
rise,  
And all thínks *flóurish* where yóu túrn your eyes.

Pope has attained metrical variety by the free substitution of trochees and spondees for the normal iambs; he has achieved rhythmic variety by arranging phrases and clauses (units of syntax and logic) of different lengths within single lines and couplets, so that the passage moves with the sinuous fluency of thought and feeling; and he not only has chosen musical combinations of words but has also subtly modulated the harmony of the passage by unobtrusive patterns of alliteration and assonance.

Contrast with this pastoral passage lines 16–25 of the “Epilogue to the Satires, Dialogue 2” (1738), in which Pope is not making music but imitating actual conversation so realistically that the metrical pattern and the integrity of the couplet and individual line seem to be destroyed (although in fact they remain in place). As above, double bars indicate where strong pauses might fall in the middle of lines in a live, vocal performance; here, possible lesser pauses are marked by single bars. In a dialogue with a friend who warns him that his satire is too personal, indeed mere libel, the poet-satirist replies:

Yé státesmen, | priests of one religion all!  
Yé trádesmen vile || in army, court, or hall!  
Yé réverend atheists. || F. Scandal! | name them, |  
Who?  
P. Why that's the thing you bid me not to do.  
Whó stárved a sister, || who foreswore a debt,  
Í néver named; || the town's inquiring yet.  
The poisoning dame—| F. Yóu méan—| P. I don't—| F.  
Yóu dó.  
P. Sée, nów Í kéep the secret, || and nót yóu!  
The bribing statesman—| F. Hóld, || tóo hích you go.

P. The bribed elector—|| F. There you stoop too  
low.

In such a passage the language and rhythms of poetry merge with the language and rhythms of impassioned living speech.

Another sort of variety derives from Pope's respect for the idea that the different kinds of literature have their different and appropriate styles. Thus *An Essay on Criticism*, an informal discussion of literary theory, is written, like Horace's *Art of Poetry* (a similarly didactic poem), in a plain style, the easy language of well-bred talk. *The Rape of the Lock*, "a heroi-comical poem" (that is, a comic poem that treats trivial material in an epic style), employs the lofty heroic language that John Dryden had perfected in his translation of Virgil and introduces amusing parodies of passages in *Paradise Lost*, parodies later raised to truly Miltonic sublimity and complexity by the conclusion of *The Dunciad*. *Eloisa to Abelard* renders the brooding, passionate voice of its heroine in a declamatory language, given to sudden outbursts and shifts of tone, that recalls the stage. The grave epistles that make up *An Essay on Man*, a philosophical discussion of such majestic themes as the Creator and His creation, the universe, human nature, society, and happiness, are written in a stately forensic language and tone and constantly employ the traditional rhetorical figures. The *Imitations of Horace* and, above all, the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, his finest poem "in the Horatian way," reveal Pope's final mastery of the plain style of Horace's epistles and satires and support his image of himself as the heir of the Roman poet. In short, no other poet of the century can equal Pope in the range of his materials, the diversity of his poetic styles, and the wizardry of his technique.

**An Essay on Criticism** There is no more pleasant introduction to the canons of taste in the Restoration and eighteenth century than Pope's *An Essay on Criticism*. As Addison said in his review in *Spectator* 253, it assembles the "most known and most received observations on the subject of literature and criticism." Pope was attempting to do for his time what Horace, in his *Art of Poetry*, and what Nicolas Boileau (French poet, of the age of Louis XIV), in his *L'Art poétique*, had done for theirs. Horace is Pope's model not only for principles of criticism but also for style, especially in the simple, conversational language and the tone of well-bred ease.

In framing his critical creed, Pope did not try for novelty: he wished merely to give to generally accepted doctrines pleasing and memorable expression and make them useful to modern poets. Here one meets the key words of neoclassical criticism: *wit*, *Nature*, *ancients*, *rules*, and *genius*. *Wit* in the poem is a word of many meanings—a clever remark or the person who makes it, a conceit, liveliness of mind, inventiveness, fancy, genius, a genius, and poetry itself, among others. *Nature* is an equally ambiguous word, meaning not "things out there" or "the outdoors" but, most important, that which is representative, universal, permanent in human experience as opposed to the idiosyncratic, the individual, the temporary. In line 21, *Nature* comes close to meaning "intuitive knowledge." In line 52, it means that half-personified power manifested in the cosmic order, which in its modes of working is a model for art. The reverence felt by many writers of the period for the great writers of ancient Greece and Rome raised the question how far the authority of these *ancients* extended. Were their works to be received as models to be conscientiously imitated? Were the *rules* received from them or deducible from their works to be accepted as prescriptive laws or merely convenient guides? Was individual *genius* to be bound by what has been conventionally held to be *Nature*, by the authority of the *ancients*, and by the legalistic pedantry of *rules*? Or could it go its own way?

In Part 1 of the *Essay*, Pope constructs a harmonious system in which he effects a compromise among all these conflicting forces—a

compromise that is typical of his times. Part 2 analyzes the causes of faulty criticism. Part 3 characterizes the good critic and praises the great critics of the past.

# **An Essay on Criticism**

## ***Part 1***

'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill  
Appear in writing or in judging ill;  
But of the two less dangerous is the offense  
To tire our patience than mislead our sense.  
Some few in that, but numbers err in this,  
5 Ten censure<sup>o</sup> wrong for one who writes amiss;  
A fool might once himself alone expose,  
Now one in verse makes many more in prose.  
'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none  
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.  
10 In poets as true genius is but rare,  
True taste as seldom is the critic's share;  
Both must alike from Heaven derive their light,  
These born to judge, as well as those to write.  
Let such teach others who themselves excel,  
15 And censure freely who have written well.  
Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,  
But are not critics to their judgment too?  
Yet if we look more closely, we shall find  
Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind:  
20 Nature affords at least a glimmering light;  
The lines, though touched but faintly, are drawn  
right.  
But as the slightest sketch, if justly traced, }  
Is by ill coloring but the more disgraced, }  
So by false learning is good sense defaced:  
25 Some are bewildered in the maze of schools,  
And some made coxcombs<sup>1</sup> Nature meant but fools.  
In search of wit these lose their common sense,  
And then turn critics in their own defense:  
Each burns alike, who can, or cannot write,  
30 Or with a rival's or an eunuch's spite.



All fools have still an itching to deride,  
And fain would be upon the laughing side.  
If Maevius<sup>2</sup> scribble in Apollo's spite,  
There are who judge still worse than he can write.  
35       Some have at first for wits, then poets passed,  
Turned critics next, and proved plain fools at last.  
Some neither can for wits nor critics pass,  
As heavy mules are neither horse nor ass.  
Those half-learn'd wittings, numerous in our isle,  
40       As half-formed insects on the banks of Nile;<sup>3</sup>  
Unfinished things, one knows not what to call,  
Their generation's so equivocal:  
To tell<sup>o</sup> them would a hundred tongues require,  
Or one vain wit's, that might a hundred tire.  
45       But you who seek to give and merit fame,  
And justly bear a critic's noble name,  
Be sure yourself and your own reach to know,  
How far your genius, taste, and learning go;  
Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet,  
50       And mark that point where sense and dullness meet.  
Nature to all things fixed the limits fit,  
And wisely curbed proud man's pretending<sup>o</sup> wit.  
As on the land while here the ocean gains,  
In other parts it leaves wide sandy plains;  
55       Thus in the soul while memory prevails,  
The solid power of understanding fails;  
Where beams of warm imagination play,  
The memory's soft figures melt away.  
One science<sup>o</sup> only will one genius fit,  
60       So vast is art, so narrow human wit.  
Not only bounded to peculiar arts,  
But oft in those confined to single parts.  
Like kings we lose the conquests gained before,  
By vain ambition still to make them more;  
65       Each might his several province well command,

Would all but stoop to what they understand.

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame  
By her just standard, which is still the same;  
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,  
70 One clear, unchanged, and universal light,  
Life, force, and beauty must to all impart,  
At once the source, and end, and test of art.  
Art from that fund each just supply provides,  
Works without show, and without pomp presides.  
75 In some fair body thus the informing soul  
With spirits feeds, with vigor fills the whole,  
Each motion guides, and every nerve sustains;  
Itself unseen, but in the effects remains.  
Some, to whom Heaven in wit has been profuse,  
80 Want as much more to turn it to its use;  
For wit and judgment often are at strife,  
Though meant each other's aid, like man and wife.  
'Tis more to guide than spur the Muse's steed,  
Restrain his fury than provoke his speed;  
85 The wingèd courser,<sup>4</sup> like a generous<sub>o</sub> horse,  
Shows most true mettle when you check his course.

Those rules of old discovered, not devised,  
Are Nature still, but Nature methodized;  
Nature, like liberty, is but restrained  
90 By the same laws which first herself ordained.

Hear how learn'd Greece her useful rules indites,  
When to repress and when indulge our flights:  
High on Parnassus' top her sons she showed,  
And pointed out those arduous paths they trod;  
95 Held from afar, aloft, the immortal prize,  
And urged the rest by equal steps to rise.  
Just precepts thus from great examples given,  
She drew from them what they derived from  
Heaven.

The generous critic fanned the poet's fire,  
100

And taught the world with reason to admire.  
Then criticism the Muse's handmaid proved,  
To dress her charms, and make her more beloved:  
But following wits from that intention strayed,  
Who could not win the mistress, wooed the maid;  
105 Against the poets their own arms they turned,  
Sure to hate most the men from whom they learned.  
So modern 'pothecaries, taught the art  
By doctors's bills<sup>o</sup> to play the doctor's part,  
Bold in the practice of mistaken rules,  
110 Prescribe, apply, and call their masters fools.  
Some on the leaves of ancient authors prey,  
Nor time nor moths e'er spoiled so much as they.  
Some dryly plain, without invention's aid,  
Write dull receipts<sup>5</sup> how poems may be made.  
115 These leave the sense their learning to display,  
And those explain the meaning quite away.  
    You then whose judgment the right course would  
    steer,  
Know well each ancient's proper character;  
His fable,<sup>6</sup> subject, scope<sup>o</sup> in every page;  
120 Religion, country, genius of his age:  
Without all these at once before your eyes,  
Cavil you may, but never criticize.  
Be Homer's works your study and delight,  
Read them by day, and meditate by night;  
125 Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims  
    bring,  
And trace the Muses upward to their spring.  
Still with itself compared, his text peruse;  
And let your comment be the Mantuan Muse.  
    When first young Maro<sup>7</sup> in his boundless mind  
130 A work to outlast immortal Rome designed,  
Perhaps he seemed above the critic's law,  
And but from Nature's fountains scorned to draw;

But when to examine every part he came,  
 Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.  
 135 Convinced, amazed, he checks the bold design,  
 And rules as strict his labored work confine }  
 As if the Stagirite<sup>8</sup> o'erlooked each line. }  
 Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;  
 To copy Nature is to copy them.  
 140 Some beauties yet no precepts can declare,  
 For there's a happiness as well as care.<sup>9</sup>  
 Music resembles poetry, in each }  
 Are nameless graces which no methods }  
 teach,  
 And which a master hand alone can reach.  
 145 If, where the rules not far enough extend  
 (Since rules were made but to promote their end)  
 Some lucky license answers to the full  
 The intent proposed, that license is a rule.  
 Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take,  
 150 May boldly deviate from the common track.  
 Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend,  
 And rise to faults true critics dare not mend;  
 From vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,  
 And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art,  
 155 Which, without passing through the judgment, gains  
 The heart, and all its end at once attains.  
 In prospects thus, some objects please our eyes,  
 Which out of Nature's common order rise, }  
 The shapeless rock, or hanging precipice. }  
 160 But though the ancients thus their rules  
 invade<sup>o</sup>  
 (As kings dispense with laws themselves have made)  
 Moderns, beware! or if you must offend  
 Against the precept, ne'er transgress its end;  
 Let it be seldom, and compelled by need;  
 165 And have at least their precedent to plead.

The critic else proceeds without remorse,  
Seizes your fame, and puts his laws in force.

I know there are, to whose presumptuous  
thoughts

170 Those freer beauties, even in them, seem faults.<sup>1</sup>  
Some figures monstrous and misshaped appear,  
Considered singly, or beheld too near,  
Which, but proportioned to their light or place,  
Due distance reconciles to form and grace.

175 A prudent chief not always must display  
His powers in equal ranks and fair array,  
But with the occasion and the place comply,  
Conceal his force, nay seem sometimes to fly.  
Those oft are stratagems which errors seem,  
Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.

180 Still green with bays each ancient altar stands  
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands,  
Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage,  
Destructive war, and all-involving age.  
See, from each clime the learn'd their incense bring!  
185 Here in all tongues consenting<sup>o</sup> paeans ring!  
In praise so just let every voice be joined,<sup>2</sup>  
And fill the general chorus of mankind.

Hail, bards triumphant! born in happier days,  
Immortal heirs of universal praise!  
190 Whose honors with increase of ages grow,  
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow;  
Nations unborn your mighty names shall sound,  
And worlds applaud that must not yet be found!  
Oh, may some spark of your celestial fire,  
195 The last, the meanest of your sons inspire  
(That on weak wings, from far, pursues your flights,  
Glows while he reads, but trembles as he writes)  
To teach vain wits a science little known,  
200 To admire superior sense, and doubt their own!

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Superficial pretenders to learning.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A silly poet alluded to contemptuously by Virgil in *Eclogue* 3 and by Horace in *Epode* 10.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The ancients believed that many forms of life were spontaneously generated in the fertile mud of the Nile.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pegasus, associated with the Muses and poetic inspiration.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Formulas for preparing a dish; recipes. Pope himself wrote an amusing burlesque, "Receipt to Make an Epic Poem," first published in the *Guardian* 78 (1713).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Plot or story of a play or poem.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Virgil, who was born in a village adjacent to Mantua in Italy, hence "Mantuan Muse." His epic, the *Aeneid*, was modeled on Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and was considered to be a refinement of the Greek poems. Thus it could be thought of as a commentary ("comment") on Homer's poems.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Aristotle, a native of Stagira, from whose *Poetics* later critics formulated strict rules for writing tragedy and the epic.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, no rules ("precepts") can explain ("declare") some beautiful effects in a work of art that can be the result only of inspiration or good luck ("happiness"), not of painstaking labor ("care").[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Pronounced *fawts*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pronounced *jined*.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *judge*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *reckon, count*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *aspiring*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *branch of learning*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirited, highly bred*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *prescriptions*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *aim, purpose*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *violate*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *agreeing, concurring*[Return to reference](#) °

## **Part 2**

Of all the causes which conspire to blind  
Man's erring judgment, and misguide the mind,  
What the weak head with strongest bias rules,  
Is pride, the never-failing vice of fools.  
Whatever Nature has in worth denied,  
205 She gives in large recruits<sup>o</sup> of needful pride;  
For as in bodies, thus in souls, we find  
What wants in blood and spirits, swelled with wind:  
Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defense,  
And fills up all the mighty void of sense.  
210 If once right reason drives that cloud away,  
Truth breaks upon us with resistless day.  
Trust not yourself: but your defects to know,  
Make use of every friend—and every foe.  
A little learning is a dangerous thing;  
215 Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.<sup>3</sup>  
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,  
And drinking largely sobers us again.  
Fired at first sight with what the Muse imparts,  
In fearless youth we tempt<sup>o</sup> the heights of arts,  
220 While from the bounded level of our mind  
Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind;  
But more advanced, behold with strange surprise  
New distant scenes of endless science rise!  
So pleased at first the towering Alps we try,  
225 Mount o'er the vales, and seem to tread the sky,  
The eternal snows appear already past,  
And the first clouds and mountains seem the last;  
But, those attained, we tremble to survey  
The growing labors of the lengthened way,  
230 The increasing prospect tires our wandering eyes,  
Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise!



A perfect judge will read each work of wit  
With the same spirit that its author writ:  
Survey the whole, nor seek slight faults to find  
235 Where Nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;  
Nor lose, for that malignant dull delight,  
The generous pleasure to be charmed with wit.  
But in such lays as neither ebb nor flow,  
Correctly cold, and regularly low,  
240 That, shunning faults, one quiet tenor keep,  
We cannot blame indeed—but we may sleep.  
In wit, as nature, what affects our hearts  
Is not the exactness of peculiar<sup>o</sup> parts;  
'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call,  
245 But the joint force and full result of all.  
Thus when we view some well-proportioned dome<sup>4</sup>  
(The world's just wonder, and even thine, O Rome!),  
No single parts unequally surprise,  
All comes united to the admiring eyes:  
250 No monstrous height, or breadth, or length appear;  
The whole at once is bold and regular.  
Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,  
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.  
In every work regard the writer's end,  
255 Since none can compass more than they intend;  
And if the means be just, the conduct true,  
Applause, in spite of trivial faults, is due.  
As men of breeding, sometimes men of wit,  
To avoid great errors must the less commit,  
260 Neglect the rules each verbal critic lays,  
For not to know some trifles is a praise.  
Most critics, fond of some subservient art,  
Still make the whole depend upon a part:  
They talk of principles, but notions prize,  
265 And all to one loved folly sacrifice.

Once on a time La Mancha's knight,<sup>5</sup> they say,

A certain bard encountering on the way,  
Discoursed in terms as just, with looks as sage,  
270 As e'er could Dennis,<sup>6</sup> of the Grecian stage;  
Concluding all were desperate sots and fools  
Who durst depart from Aristotle's rules.  
Our author, happy in a judge so nice,  
Produced his play, and begged the knight's advice;  
275 Made him observe the subject and the plot,  
The manners, passions, unities; what not?  
All which exact to rule were brought about,  
Were but a combat in the lists left out.  
"What! leave the combat out?" exclaims the knight.  
"Yes, or we must renounce the Stagirite."  
280 "Not so, by Heaven!" he answers in a rage,  
"Knights, squires, and steeds must enter on the  
stage."  
"So vast a throng the stage can ne'er contain."  
"Then build a new, or act it in a plain."  
285 Thus critics of less judgment than caprice,  
Curious,<sup>o</sup> not knowing, not exact, but nice,<sup>o</sup>  
Form short ideas, and offend in arts  
(As most in manners), by a love to parts.  
Some to conceit<sup>z</sup> alone their taste confine,  
290 And glittering thoughts struck out at every line;  
Pleased with a work where nothing's just or fit,  
One glaring chaos and wild heap of wit.  
Poets, like painters, thus unskilled to trace  
The naked nature and the living grace,  
295 With gold and jewels cover every part,  
And hide with ornaments their want of art.  
True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed;  
Something whose truth convinced at sight we find,  
300 That gives us back the image of our mind.  
As shades more sweetly recommend the light,

So modest plainness sets off sprightly wit;  
 For works may have more wit than does them good,  
 As bodies perish through excess of blood.  
 Others for language all their care express,  
 305 And value books, as women men, for dress.  
 Their praise is still—the style is excellent;  
 The sense they humbly take upon content.<sup>8</sup>  
 Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,  
 Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.  
 310 False eloquence, like the prismatic glass,  
 Its gaudy colors spreads on every place;<sup>9</sup>  
 The face of Nature we no more survey,  
 All glares alike, without distinction gay.  
 But true expression, like the unchanging sun,  
 315 Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon; }  
 It gilds all objects, but it alters none. }  
 Expression is the dress of thought, and still  
 Appears more decent as more suitable.  
 A vile conceit in pompous words expressed  
 320 Is like a clown<sup>o</sup> in regal purple dressed:  
 For different styles with different subjects sort,  
 As several garbs with country, town, and court.  
 Some by old words to fame have made pretense,  
 Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense.  
 325 Such labored nothings, in so strange a style,  
 Amaze the unlearn'd, and make the learned smile;  
 Unlucky as Fungoso<sup>1</sup> in the play,  
 These sparks with awkward vanity display }  
 What the fine gentleman wore yesterday; }  
 330 And but so mimic ancient wits at best,  
 As apes our grandsires in their doublets dressed.  
 In words as fashions the same rule will hold,  
 Alike fantastic if too new or old:  
 Be not the first by whom the new are tried,  
 335 Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

But most by numbers<sup>o</sup> judge a poet's song,  
 And smooth or rough with them is right or wrong.  
 In the bright Muse though thousand charms  
 conspire,  
 340 Her voice is all these tuneful fools admire,  
 Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear,  
 Not mend their minds; as some to church repair,  
 Not for the doctrine, but the music there. }  
 These equal syllables alone require,  
 345 Though oft the ear the open vowels tire,<sup>2</sup>  
 While expletives<sup>3</sup> their feeble aid do join,  
 And ten low words oft creep in one dull line:  
 While they ring round the same unvaried chimes,  
 With sure returns of still expected rhymes;  
 350 Where'er you find "the cooling western breeze,"  
 In the next line, it "whispers through the trees";  
 If crystal streams "with pleasing murmurs creep,"  
 The reader's threatened (not in vain) with "sleep";  
 Then, at the last and only couplet fraught  
 With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,  
 355 A needless Alexandrine<sup>4</sup> ends the song  
 That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length  
 along.  
 Leave such to tune their own dull rhymes, and know  
 What's roundly smooth or languishingly slow;  
 And praise the easy vigor of a line  
 360 Where Denham's strength and Waller's sweetness  
 join.<sup>5</sup>  
 True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,  
 As those move easiest who have learned to dance.  
 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offense,  
 The sound must seem an echo to the sense.  
 365 Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,  
 And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;  
 But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,

The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar.  
When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,  
370 The line too labors, and the words move slow;  
Not so when swift Camilla<sup>6</sup> scours the plain,  
Flies o'er the unbending corn, and skims along the  
main.

Hear how Timotheus'<sup>7</sup> varied lays surprise,  
And bid alternate passions fall and rise!  
375 While at each change the son of Libyan Jove<sup>o</sup>  
Now burns with glory, and then melts with love;  
Now his fierce eyes with sparkling fury glow,  
Now sighs steal out, and tears begin to flow:  
380 Persians and Greeks like turns of nature<sup>8</sup> found  
And the world's victor stood subdued by sound!  
The power of music all our hearts allow,  
And what Timotheus was, is Dryden now.

Avoid extremes; and shun the fault of such  
Who still are pleased too little or too much.  
385 At every trifle scorn to take offense:  
That always shows great pride, or little sense.  
Those heads, as stomachs, are not sure the best,  
Which nauseate all, and nothing can digest.  
Yet let not each gay turn thy rapture move;  
390 For fools admire,<sup>o</sup> but men of sense approve:<sup>9</sup>  
As things seem large which we through mists descry,  
Dullness is ever apt to magnify.

Some foreign writers, some our own despise;  
The ancients only, or the moderns prize.  
395 Thus wit, like faith, by each man is applied  
To one small sect, and all are damned beside.  
Meanly they seek the blessing to confine,  
And force that sun but on a part to shine,  
Which not alone the southern wit sublimed,<sup>o</sup>  
400 But ripens spirits in cold northern climes;  
Which from the first has shone on ages past,

Enlights the present, and shall warm the last;  
 Though each may feel increases and decays,  
 And see now clearer and now darker days.  
 405 Regard not then if wit be old or new,  
 But blame the false and value still the true.  
 Some ne'er advance a judgment of their own,  
 But catch the spreading notion of the town;  
 They reason and conclude by precedent,  
 410 And own<sup>o</sup> stale nonsense which they ne'er invent.  
 Some judge of authors' names, not works, and then  
 Nor praise nor blame the writings, but the men.  
 Of all this servile herd the worst is he  
 415 That in proud dullness joins with quality,<sup>1</sup>  
 A constant critic at the great man's board,  
 To fetch and carry nonsense for my lord.  
 What woeful stuff this madrigal would be  
 In some starved hackney sonneteer<sup>o</sup> or me!  
 But let a lord once own the happy lines,  
 420 How the wit brightens! how the style refines!  
 Before his sacred name flies every fault,  
 And each exalted stanza teems with thought!  
 The vulgar thus through imitation err;  
 As oft the learn'd by being singular;  
 425 So much they scorn the crowd, that if the throng  
 By chance go right, they purposely go wrong.  
 So schismatics<sup>2</sup> the plain believers quit,  
 And are but damned for having too much wit.  
 Some praise at morning what they blame at night,  
 430 But always think the last opinion right.  
 A Muse by these is like a mistress used,  
 This hour she's idolized, the next abused;  
 While their weak heads like towns unfortified,  
 'Twixt sense and nonsense daily change their side.  
 435 Ask them the cause; they're wiser still, they say;  
 And still tomorrow's wiser than today.

We think our fathers fools, so wise we grow;  
Our wiser sons, no doubt, will think us so.  
Once school divines<sup>3</sup> this zealous isle o'erspread;  
440 Who knew most sentences<sup>4</sup> was deepest read.  
Faith, Gospel, all seemed made to be disputed,  
And none had sense enough to be confuted.  
Scotists and Thomists now in peace remain  
Amidst their kindred cobwebs in Duck Lane.<sup>5</sup>  
445 If faith itself has different dresses worn,  
What wonder modes in wit should take their turn?  
Oft, leaving what is natural and fit,  
The current folly proves the ready wit;  
And authors think their reputation safe,  
450 Which lives as long as fools are pleased to laugh.  
Some valuing those of their own side or mind,  
Still make themselves the measure of mankind:  
Fondly<sup>o</sup> we think we honor merit then,  
When we but praise ourselves in other men.  
455 Parties in wit attend on those of state,  
And public faction doubles private hate.  
Pride, Malice, Folly against Dryden rose,  
In various shapes of parsons, critics, beaux;  
But sense survived, when merry jests were past;  
460 For rising merit will buoy up at last.  
Might he return and bless once more our eyes,  
New Blackmores and new Milbourns<sup>6</sup> must arise.  
Nay, should great Homer lift his awful head,  
Zoilus<sup>7</sup> again would start up from the dead.  
465 Envy will merit, as its shade, pursue,  
But like a shadow, proves the substance true;  
For envied wit, like Sol eclipsed, makes known  
The opposing body's grossness, not its own.  
When first that sun too powerful beams displays,  
470 It draws up vapors which obscure its rays;  
But even those clouds at last adorn its way,

Reflect new glories, and augment the day.  
Be thou the first true merit to befriend;  
His praise is lost who stays till all commend.  
475 Short is the date, alas! of modern rhymes,  
And 'tis but just to let them live betimes.<sup>o</sup>  
No longer now that golden age appears,  
When patriarch wits survived a thousand years:  
Now length of fame (our second life) is lost,  
480 And bare threescore is all even that can boast;  
Our sons their fathers' failing language see,  
And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be.<sup>8</sup>  
So when the faithful pencil has designed  
Some bright idea of the master's mind,  
485 Where a new world leaps out at his command,  
And ready Nature waits upon his hand;  
When the ripe colors soften and unite,  
And sweetly melt into just shade and light;  
When mellowing years their full perfection give,  
490 And each bold figure just begins to live,  
The treacherous colors the fair art betray,  
And all the bright creation fades away!  
Unhappy<sup>o</sup> wit, like most mistaken things,  
Atones not for that envy which it brings.  
495 In youth alone its empty praise we boast,  
But soon the short-lived vanity is lost;  
Like some fair flower the early spring supplies,  
That gaily blooms, but even in blooming dies.  
What is this wit, which must our cares employ?  
500 The owner's wife, that other men enjoy;  
Then most our trouble still when most admired,  
And still the more we give, the more required;  
Whose fame with pains we guard, but lose with  
ease,  
Sure some to vex, but never all to please;  
505 'Tis what the vicious fear, the virtuous shun,



By fools 'tis hated, and by knaves undone!  
If wit so much from ignorance undergo,  
Ah, let not learning too commence its foe!  
Of old those met rewards who could excel,  
510 And such were praised who but endeavored well;  
Though triumphs were to generals only due,  
Crowns were reserved to grace the soldiers too.<sup>9</sup>  
Now they who reach Parnassus' lofty crown  
Employ their pains to spurn<sup>o</sup> some others down;  
515 And while self-love each jealous writer rules,  
Contending wits become the sport of fools;  
But still the worst with most regret commend,  
For each ill author is as bad a friend.  
To what base ends, and by what abject ways,  
520 Are mortals urged through sacred<sup>o</sup> lust of praise!<sup>1</sup>  
Ah, ne'er so dire a thirst of glory boast,  
Nor in the critic let the man be lost!  
Good nature and good sense must ever join;  
To err is human, to forgive divine.  
525 But if in noble minds some dregs remain  
Not yet purged off, of spleen<sup>o</sup> and sour disdain,  
Discharge that rage on more provoking crimes,  
Nor fear a dearth in these flagitious<sup>o</sup> times.  
No pardon vile obscenity should find,  
530 Though wit and art conspire to move your mind;  
But dullness with obscenity must prove  
As shameful sure as impotence in love.  
In the fat age of pleasure, wealth, and ease  
Sprung the rank weed, and thrived with large  
535 increase:  
When love was all an easy monarch's<sup>2</sup> care,  
Seldom at council, never in a war;  
Jilts<sup>3</sup> ruled the state, and statesmen farces writ;  
Nay, wits had pensions, and young lords had wit;  
The fair sat panting at a courtier's play,

540 And not a mask<sup>4</sup> went unimproved away;  
 The modest fan was lifted up no more,  
 And virgins smiled at what they blushed before.  
 The following license of a foreign reign  
 545 Did all the dregs of bold Socinus<sup>5</sup> drain;  
 Then unbelieving priests reformed the nation,  
 And taught more pleasant methods of salvation;  
 Where Heaven's free subjects might their rights  
 dispute,  
 Lest God himself should seem too absolute;  
 Pulpits their sacred satire learned to spare,  
 550 And Vice admired<sup>o</sup> to find a flatterer there!  
 Encouraged thus, wit's Titans braved the skies,  
 And the press groaned with licensed blasphemies.  
 These monsters, critics! with your darts engage,  
 Here point your thunder, and exhaust your rage!  
 555 Yet shun their fault, who, scandalously nice,<sup>o</sup>  
 Will needs mistake an author into vice;  
 All seems infected that the infected spy,  
 As all looks yellow to the jaundiced eye.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: The spring in Pieria on Mount Olympus, sacred to the Muses.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The dome of St. Peter's, designed by Michelangelo.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Don Quixote. The story comes not from Cervantes' novel, but from a spurious sequel to it by Don Alonzo Fernandez de Avellaneda.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: John Dennis (1657–1734), although one of the leading critics of the time, was frequently ridiculed by the wits for his irascibility and pomposity. Pope apparently did not know Dennis personally, but his jibe at him in Part 3 of this poem made him a bitter enemy.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Pointed wit, ingenuity, and extravagance, or affectation in the use of figures, especially similes and metaphors.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dr. Johnson actually uses this Pope line to illustrate a distinct meaning. “Satisfaction in a thing unexamined’ (Johnson’s *Dictionary*)”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A very up-to-date scientific reference. Newton’s *Opticks*, which dealt with the prism and the spectrum, had been published in 1704, although his theories had been known earlier.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A character in Ben Jonson’s comedy *Every Man out of His Humor* (1599).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In lines 345–57 Pope cleverly contrives to make his own metrics or diction illustrate the faults that he is exposing.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Words used merely to achieve the necessary number of feet in a line of verse.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A line of verse containing six iambic feet; it is illustrated in the next line.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Dryden, whom Pope echoes here, considered Sir John Denham (1615–1669) and Edmund Waller (1606–1687) to have been the principal shapers of the closed pentameter couplet. He had distinguished the “strength” of the one and the “sweetness” of the other.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Fleet-footed virgin warrior (*Aeneid* 7, 11).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The musician in Dryden’s “Alexander’s Feast.” Pope retells the story of that poem in the following lines.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Alternations of feelings.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Judge favorably only after due deliberation.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: People of high rank.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Those who have divided the church on points of theology. Pope stressed the first syllable, the pronunciation approved by Johnson in his *Dictionary*.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The medieval theologians, such as the followers of Duns Scotus and St. Thomas Aquinas, mentioned in line 444.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Allusion to Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences*, a book esteemed by Scholastic philosophers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Street where publishers' remainders and secondhand books were sold.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Luke Milbourn had attacked Dryden's translation of Virgil. Sir Richard Blackmore, physician and poet, had attacked Dryden for the immorality of his plays.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A Greek critic of the 4th century B.C.E. who wrote a book of carping criticism of Homer.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The radical changes that took place in the English language between the death of Chaucer in 1400 and the death of Dryden in 1700 suggested that in another three hundred years Dryden would be unintelligible.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: To celebrate Roman victories, valiant soldiers were decorated with a variety of crowns.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The phrase imitates Virgil's *auri sacra famis*, "accursed hunger for gold" (*Aeneid* 3.57).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Charles II. The concluding lines of Part 2 discuss the corruption of wit and poetry under this monarch.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mistresses of the king.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A woman wearing a mask.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The name of two Italian theologians of the 16th century who denied the divinity of Jesus. Pope charges that freethinkers attained the upper hand during the "foreign reign" of William III, a Dutchman.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *supplies*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *attempt*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *particular*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *laborious* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *fussy* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *country bumpkin* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *versification* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Alexander the Great* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wonder* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *raises up, purifies* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lay claim to* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *hireling poet* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foolishly* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *for a brief time* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ill-fated* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *kick* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accursed* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *rancor* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *scandalously wicked* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *wondered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *subtle* [Return to reference](#) °

### **Part 3**

Learn then what morals critics ought to show,  
560 For 'tis but half a judge's task, to know.  
'Tis not enough, taste, judgment, learning, join;  
In all you speak, let truth and candor<sup>5</sup> shine:  
That not alone what to your sense is due  
All may allow; but seek your friendship too.  
565 Be silent always when you doubt your sense;  
And speak, though sure, with seeming diffidence:  
Some positive, persisting fops we know,  
Who, if once wrong, will needs be always so;  
But you, with pleasure own your errors past,  
570 And make each day a critic<sup>6</sup> on the last.  
'Tis not enough, your counsel still be true;  
Blunt truths more mischief than nice falsehoods do;  
Men must be taught as if you taught them not,  
And things unknown proposed as things forgot.  
575 Without good breeding, truth is disapproved;  
That only makes superior sense beloved.  
Be niggards of advice on no pretense;  
For the worst avarice is that of sense.  
With mean complacence<sup>6</sup> ne'er betray your trust,  
580 Nor be so civil as to prove unjust.  
Fear not the anger of the wise to raise;  
Those best can bear reproof, who merit praise.  
'Twere well might critics still this freedom take;  
But Appius reddens at each word you speak,  
585 And stares, tremendous! with a threatening eye,  
Like some fierce tyrant in old tapestry.<sup>7</sup>  
Fear most to tax an honorable fool,  
Whose right it is, uncensured to be dull;  
Such, without wit, are poets when they please,  
590 As without learning they can take degrees.<sup>8</sup>

Leave dangerous truths to unsuccessful satyrs,<sup>o</sup>  
 And flattery to fulsome dedicators,  
 Whom, when they praise, the world believes no  
 more,  
 Than when they promise to give scribbling o'er.  
 595 'Tis best sometimes your censure to restrain,  
 And charitably let the dull be vain:  
 Your silence there is better than your spite,  
 For who can rail so long as they can write?  
 Still humming on, their drowsy course they keep,  
 600 And lashed so long, like tops, are lashed asleep.<sup>9</sup>  
 False steps but help them to renew the race,  
 As, after stumbling, jades<sup>o</sup> will mend their pace.  
 What crowds of these, impenitently bold,  
 In sounds and jingling syllables grown old,  
 605 Still run on poets, in a raging vein,  
 Even to the dregs and squeezings of the brain,  
 Strain out the last dull droppings of their sense,  
 And rhyme with all the rage of impotence.  
 Such shameless bards we have, and yet 'tis true,  
 610 There are as mad, abandoned critics too.  
 The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,  
 With loads of learned lumber<sup>o</sup> in his head,  
 With his own tongue still edifies his ears,  
 And always listening to himself appears.  
 615 All books he reads, and all he reads assails,  
 From Dryden's *Fables* down to Durfey's *Tales*.<sup>1</sup>  
 With him, most authors steal their works, or buy;  
 Garth did not write his own *Dispensary*.<sup>2</sup>  
 Name a new play, and he's the poet's friend,  
 620 Nay showed his faults—but when would poets  
 mend?  
 No place so sacred from such fops is barred,  
 Nor is Paul's church more safe than Paul's  
 churchyard:<sup>3</sup>

Nay, fly to altars; *there* they'll talk you dead:  
 For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.  
 625 Distrustful sense with modest caution speaks,  
 It still looks home, and short excursions makes;  
 But rattling nonsense in full volleys breaks, }  
 And never shocked, and never turned aside, }  
 Bursts out, resistless, with a thundering tide.  
 630 But where's the man, who counsel can bestow,  
 Still pleased to teach, and yet not proud to know?  
 Unbiased, or<sup>o</sup> by favor, or by spite:  
 Not dully prepossessed, nor blindly right;  
 Though learned, well-bred; and though well-bred,  
 635 sincere;  
 Modestly bold, and humanly severe:  
 Who to a friend his faults can freely show,  
 And gladly praise the merit of a foe?  
 Blessed with a taste exact, yet unconfined;  
 A knowledge both of books and humankind;  
 640 Gen'rous converse;<sup>4</sup> a soul exempt from pride;  
 And love to praise, with reason on his side?  
 Such once were critics; such the happy few,  
 Athens and Rome in better ages knew.  
 The mighty Stagirite<sup>o</sup> first left the shore,  
 645 Spread all his sails, and durst the deeps explore;  
 He steered securely, and discovered far,  
 Led by the light of the Maeonian star.<sup>5</sup>  
 Poets, a race long unconfined, and free,  
 Still fond and proud of savage liberty,  
 650 Received his laws; and stood convinced 'twas fit,  
 Who conquered nature, should preside o'er wit.  
 Horace still charms with graceful negligence,  
 And without method talks us into sense;  
 Will, like a friend, familiarly convey  
 655 The truest notions in the easiest<sup>o</sup> way.  
 He, who supreme in judgment, as in wit,



Might boldly censure, as he boldly writ,  
Yet judged with coolness, though he sung with fire;  
His precepts teach but what his works inspire.  
660 Our critics take a contrary extreme,  
They judge with fury, but they write with fle'me.<sup>o</sup>  
Nor suffers Horace more in wrong translations  
By wits, than critics<sup>6</sup> in as wrong quotations.  
See Dionysius<sup>7</sup> Homer's thoughts refine,  
665 And call new beauties forth from every line!  
Fancy and art in gay Petronius<sup>8</sup> please,  
The scholar's learning, with the courtier's ease.  
In grave Quintilian's<sup>9</sup> copious work, we find  
The justest rules, and clearest method joined:  
670 Thus useful arms in magazines<sup>o</sup> we place,  
All ranged in order, and disposed with grace,  
But less to please the eye, than arm the hand,  
Still fit for use, and ready at command.  
Thee, bold Longinus!<sup>1</sup> all the nine<sup>o</sup> inspire,  
675 And bless their critic with a poet's fire.  
An ardent judge, who, zealous in his trust,  
With warmth gives sentence, yet is always just;  
Whose own example strengthens all his laws,  
And is himself that great sublime he draws.  
680 Thus long succeeding critics justly reigned,  
License repressed, and useful laws ordained.  
Learning and Rome alike in empire grew;  
And arts still followed where her eagles<sup>2</sup> flew;  
From the same foes, at last, both felt their doom,  
685 And the same age saw learning fall, and Rome.  
With tyranny, then superstition joined,  
As that the body, this enslaved the mind;  
Much was believed, but little understood,  
And to be dull was construed to be good;  
690 A second deluge learning thus o'errun,  
And the monks finished what the Goths begun.<sup>3</sup>

At length Erasmus, that great, injured name  
(The glory of the priesthood, and the shame!),<sup>4</sup>  
Stemmed the wild torrent of a barb'rous age,  
695 And drove those holy Vandals off the stage.  
But see! each Muse, in Leo's golden days,  
Starts from her trance, and trims her withered bays!<sup>5</sup>  
Rome's ancient Genius, o'er its ruins spread,  
Shakes off the dust, and rears his reverend head.  
700 Then sculpture and her sister-arts revive;  
Stones leaped to form, and rocks began to live;  
With sweeter notes each rising temple rung;  
A Raphael painted, and a Vida<sup>6</sup> sung.  
Immortal Vida: on whose honored brow  
705 The poet's bays and critic's ivy grow:  
Cremona now shall ever boast thy name,  
As next in place to Mantua, next in fame!<sup>7</sup>  
But soon by impious arms from Latium<sup>8</sup> chased,  
Their ancient bounds the banished Muses passed;  
710 Thence arts o'er all the northern world advance,  
But critic-learning flourished most in France:  
The rules a nation, born to serve, obeys;  
And Boileau still in right of Horace sways.<sup>9</sup>  
But we, brave Britons, foreign laws despised,  
715 And kept unconquered—and uncivilized;  
Fierce for the liberties of wit, and bold,  
We still defied the Romans, as of old.  
Yet some there were, among the sounder few  
Of those who less presumed, and better knew,  
720 Who durst assert the juster ancient cause,  
And here restored wit's fundamental laws.  
Such was the Muse, whose rules and practice tell,  
"Nature's chief masterpiece is writing well."<sup>1</sup>  
Such was Roscommon,<sup>2</sup> not more learned than  
725 good,  
With manners gen'rous as his noble blood;

To him the wit of Greece and Rome was known,  
 And every author's merit, but his own.  
 Such late was Walsh—the Muse's<sup>3</sup> judge and friend,  
 Who justly knew to blame or to commend;  
 730 To failings mild, but zealous for desert;  
 The clearest head, and the sincerest heart.  
 This humble praise, lamented shade! receive,  
 This praise at least a grateful Muse may give:  
 735 The Muse, whose early voice you taught to sing,  
 Prescribed her heights, and pruned her tender wing,  
 (Her guide now lost) no more attempts to rise,  
 But in low numbers<sup>o</sup> short excursions tries:  
 Content, if hence the unlearned their wants may  
 view,  
 740 The learned reflect on what before they knew:  
 Careless of<sup>o</sup> censure, nor too fond of fame;  
 Still pleased to praise, yet not afraid to blame;  
 Averse alike to flatter, or offend;  
 Not free from faults, nor yet too vain to mend.

## 1709 **Endnotes**

1711

- Note 6: Softness of manners; desire of pleasing. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: This picture was taken to himself by John Dennis, a furious old critic by profession, who, upon no other provocation, wrote against this Essay and its author, in a manner perfectly lunatic [*Pope's note, 1744*]. Pope *did* intend to ridicule Dennis, whose *Appius and Virginia* had failed on the stage in 1709 and who was known for his stare and his use of the word *tremendous* (see line 270). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Honorary degrees were granted to unqualified men of rank. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Tops "sleep" when they spin so rapidly that they seem not to move. [Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Thomas D'Urfey's *Tales* (1704) were notorious potboilers. Dryden's *Fables* (1700), a set of translations, were among his most admired works.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Samuel Garth (1661–1719), who had been accused of plagiarizing his mock-epic poem *The Dispensary* (1699), was admired and defended by Pope.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Booksellers' district near St. Paul's Cathedral, whose aisles were used as a place to meet and do business.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Well-bred conversation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Homer, who was supposed to have been born in Maeonia.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, than by critics. Phrases from Horace's *Art of Poetry* were quoted incessantly by critics.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1st century B.C.E.) wrote an important treatise on the artistic arrangement of words.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Author of the *Satyricon* (1st century C.E.).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Author of the *Institutio oratoria* (ca. 95 C.E.), a famous treatise on rhetoric. Here as elsewhere, Pope's terms of praise are drawn from the author he is praising.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Supposed author of the influential treatise *On the Sublime* (1st century C.E.), greatly in vogue at the time of Pope.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Emblems on the standards of the Roman army.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pope thought that the Scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages were "holy Vandals" who had "sacked" learning as the Goths and Vandals had sacked Rome.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Erasmus (1466–1536), the great humanist scholar, was the "glory of the priesthood" because of his goodness and learning and its "shame" because he was persecuted.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The wreath of poetry. Leo X, pope from 1513 to 1521, was notable for his encouragement of artists.[Return to](#)

### [reference 5](#)

- Note 6: M. Hieronymus Vida, an excellent Latin poet, who wrote an *Art of Poetry* in verse. He flourished in the time of Leo the Tenth [*Pope's note*]. Raphael (1483–1520) painted many of his greatest works under the patronage of Leo X. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Vida came from Cremona, near Mantua, the birthplace of Virgil, his favorite poet. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Italy. German and Spanish troops sacked Rome in 1527. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Boileau's *L'Art poétique* (1674) regularized and modernized the lessons of Horace's *Art of Poetry*. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Quoted from an *Essay on Poetry* by John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham (1648–1721), who had befriended the young Pope. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon, wrote the important *Essay on Translated Verse* (1684). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Here, Pope himself. William Walsh (1663–1708), whom Dryden once called "the best critic of our nation," had advised Pope to work at becoming the first great "correct" poet in English. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *kindness, impartiality* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *critique* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *satires* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *worn-out horses* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rubbish* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *either* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Aristotle* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *least formal* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *phlegmatically* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *storehouses, arsenals*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Muses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *humble verses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *unconcerned at*[Return to reference](#) °

**The Rape of the Lock**    *The Rape of the Lock* is based on an actual episode that provoked a quarrel between two prominent Catholic families. Pope's friend John Caryll, to whom the poem is addressed (line 3), suggested that Pope write it, in the hope that a little laughter might serve to soothe ruffled tempers. Lord Petre had cut off a lock of hair from the head of the lovely Arabella Fermor (often spelled "Farmer" and doubtless so pronounced), much to the indignation of the lady and her relatives. In its original version of two cantos and 334 lines, published in 1712, *The Rape of the Lock* was a great success. In 1713 a new version was undertaken against the advice of Addison, who considered the poem perfect as it was first written. Pope greatly expanded the earlier version, adding the delightful "machinery" (the supernatural agents in epic action) of the Sylphs, Belinda's toilet, the card game, and the visit to the Cave of Spleen in Canto 4. In 1717, with the addition of Clarissa's speech on good humor, the poem assumed its final form.

With delicate fancy and playful wit, Pope elaborated the trivial episode that occasioned the poem into the semblance of an epic in miniature, the most nearly perfect mock-heroic poem in English. The verse abounds in parodies and echoes of the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, and *Paradise Lost*, thus constantly forcing the reader to compare small things with great. The familiar devices of epic are observed, but the incidents or characters are beautifully proportioned to the scale of mock epic. The *Rape* tells of war, but it is the drawing-room war between the sexes; it has its heroes and heroines, but they are beaux and belles; it has its supernatural characters ("machinery"), but they are Sylphs (borrowed, as Pope tells us in his dedicatory letter, from Rosicrucian lore)—creatures of the air, the souls of dead coquettes (surprisingly given male pronouns), with tasks appropriate to their nature—or the Gnome Umbriel, once a prude on earth; it has its epic game, played on the "velvet plain" of the card table, its feasting heroes, who sip coffee and gossip, and its battle, fought with the clichés of compliment and conceits, with frowns and angry glances, with snuff and bodkin; it has the traditional epic journey into the underworld—here the Cave of Spleen, a twisted space

dramatizing contemporary ideas about women, bodies, and hypochondria. And Pope creates a world in which these actions take place, a world that is dense with beautiful objects: brocades, ivory and tortoiseshell, cosmetics and diamonds, lacquered furniture, silver teapots, delicate chinaware—products of Britain’s global commerce that Pope seems to find both dazzling and morally suspect. It is a world that is constantly in motion and that sparkles and glitters with light, whether the light of the sun or of Belinda’s eyes or that light into which the “fluid” bodies of the Sylphs seem to dissolve as they flutter in shrouds and around the mast of Belinda’s ship. Pope laughs at this world, its ritualized triviality, its irrational, upper-class women and feminized men—and remembers that a grimmer, darker world surrounds it (3.19–24 and 5.145–48); but he also makes us aware of its beauty and charm.

The epigraph may be translated, “I was unwilling, Belinda, to ravish your locks; but I rejoice to have conceded this to your prayers” (Martial’s *Epigrams* 12.84.1–2). Pope substituted his heroine for Martial’s Polytimus. The epigraph is intended to suggest that the poem was published at Miss Fermor’s request.



# The Rape of the Lock

## *An Heroi-Comical Poem*

*Nolueram, Belinda, tuos violare capillos;  
sed juvat hoc precibus me tribuisse tuis.*

—MARTIAL

### TO MRS. ARABELLA FERMOR

MADAM,

It will be in vain to deny that I have some regard for this piece, since I dedicate it to you. Yet you may bear me witness, it was intended only to divert a few young ladies, who have good sense and good humor enough to laugh not only at their sex's little unguarded follies, but at their own. But as it was communicated with the air of a secret, it soon found its way into the world. An imperfect copy having been offered to a bookseller, you had the good nature for my sake to consent to the publication of one more correct; this I was forced to, before I had executed half my design, for the machinery was entirely wanting to complete it.

The machinery, Madam, is a term invented by the critics, to signify that part which the deities, angels, or demons are made to act in a poem; for the ancient poets are in one respect like many modern ladies: let an action be never so trivial in itself, they always make it appear of the utmost importance. These machines I determined to raise on a very new and odd foundation, the Rosicrucian<sup>1</sup> doctrine of spirits.

I know how disagreeable it is to make use of hard words before a lady; but 'tis so much the concern of a poet to have his works understood, and particularly by your sex, that you must give me leave to explain two or three difficult terms.

The Rosicrucians are a people I must bring you acquainted with. The best account I know of them is in a French book called *Le Comte de Gabalis*,<sup>2</sup> which both in its title and size is so like a novel, that many of the fair sex have read it for one by mistake. According to these gentlemen, the four elements are inhabited by spirits, which they call Sylphs, Gnomes, Nymphs, and Salamanders. The Gnomes or Demons of earth delight in mischief; but the Sylphs, whose habitation is in the air, are the best-conditioned creatures imaginable. For they say, any mortals may enjoy the most intimate familiarities with these gentle spirits, upon a condition very easy to all true adepts, an inviolate preservation of chastity.

As to the following cantos, all the passages of them are as fabulous as the vision at the beginning, or the transformation at the end (except the loss of your hair, which I always mention with reverence). The human persons are as fictitious as the airy ones; and the character of Belinda, as it is now managed, resembles you in nothing but in beauty.

If this poem had as many graces as there are in your person, or in your mind, yet I could never hope it should pass through the world half so uncensured as you have done. But let its fortune be what it will, mine is happy enough, to have given me this occasion of assuring you that I am, with the truest esteem,

MADAM,  
*Your most obedient, humble servant,*  
A. POPE

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A system of arcane philosophy introduced into England from Germany in the 17th century.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: By the Abbé de Montfaucon de Villars, published in 1670.[Return to reference 2](#)

## ***Canto 1***

What dire offense from amorous causes springs,  
What mighty contests rise from trivial things,  
I sing—This verse to Caryll, Muse! is due:  
This, even Belinda may vouchsafe to view:  
Slight is the subject, but not so the praise,  
5 If she inspire, and he approve my lays.  
Say what strange motive, Goddess! could compel  
A well-bred lord to assault a gentle belle?  
Oh, say what stranger cause, yet unexplored,  
Could make a gentle belle reject a lord?  
10 In tasks so bold can little men engage,  
And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage?  
Sol through white curtains shot a timorous ray,  
And oped those eyes that must eclipse the day.  
Now lapdogs give themselves the rousing shake,  
15 And sleepless lovers, just at twelve, awake:  
Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knocked the  
ground,<sup>3</sup>  
And the pressed watch<sup>4</sup> returned a silver sound.  
Belinda still her downy pillow pressed,  
Her guardian Sylph prolonged the balmy rest.  
20 'Twas he had summoned to her silent bed  
The morning dream that hovered o'er her head.  
A youth more glittering than a birthnight beau<sup>5</sup>  
(That even in slumber caused her cheek to glow)  
Seemed to her ear his winning lips to lay,  
25 And thus in whispers said, or seemed to say:  
"Fairest of mortals, thou distinguished care  
Of thousand bright inhabitants of air!  
If e'er one vision touched thy infant thought,  
Of all the nurse and all the priest have taught,  
30 Of airy elves by moonlight shadows seen,

The silver token, and the circled green,<sup>6</sup>  
Or virgins visited by angel powers,  
With golden crowns and wreaths of heavenly  
flowers,  
Hear and believe! thy own importance know,  
35 Nor bound thy narrow views to things below.  
Some secret truths, from learned pride concealed,  
To maids alone and children are revealed:  
What though no credit doubting wits may give?  
The fair and innocent shall still believe.  
40 Know, then, unnumbered spirits round thee fly,  
The light militia of the lower sky:  
These, though unseen, are ever on the wing,  
Hang o'er the box, and hover round the Ring.<sup>7</sup>  
Think what an equipage thou hast in air,  
45 And view with scorn two pages and a chair.<sup>8</sup>  
As now your own, our beings were of old,  
And once enclosed in woman's beauteous mold;  
Thence, by a soft transition, we repair  
From earthly vehicles to these of air.  
50 Think not, when woman's transient breath is fled,  
That all her vanities at once are dead:  
Succeeding vanities she still regards,  
And though she plays no more, o'erlooks the cards.  
Her joy in gilded chariots, when alive,  
55 And love of ombre,<sup>8</sup> after death survive.  
For when the Fair in all their pride expire,  
To their first elements<sup>9</sup> their souls retire:  
The sprites of fiery termagants<sup>1</sup> in flame  
Mount up, and take a Salamander's<sup>2</sup> name.  
60 Soft yielding minds to water glide away,  
And sip, with Nymphs, their elemental tea.<sup>3</sup>  
The graver prude sinks downward to a Gnome,  
In search of mischief still on earth to roam.  
The light coquettes in Sylphs aloft repair,

And sport and flutter in the fields of air.  
65       "Know further yet; whoever fair and chaste  
Rejects mankind, is by some Sylph embraced:  
For spirits, freed from mortal laws, with ease  
70       Assume what sexes and what shapes they please.<sup>4</sup>  
What guards the purity of melting maids,  
In courtly balls, and midnight masquerades,  
Safe from the treacherous friend, the daring spark,  
The glance by day, the whisper in the dark,  
75       When kind occasion prompts their warm desires,  
When music softens, and when dancing fires?  
'Tis but their Sylph, the wise Celestials<sup>o</sup> know,  
Though Honor is the word with men below.  
      "Some nymphs<sup>5</sup> there are, too conscious of their  
face,  
For life predestined to the Gnomes' embrace.  
80       These swell their prospects and exalt their pride,  
When offers are disdained, and love denied:  
Then gay ideas<sup>o</sup> crowd the vacant brain,  
While peers, and dukes, and all their sweeping train,  
And garters, stars, and coronets<sup>6</sup> appear,  
85       And in soft sounds, 'your Grace'<sup>o</sup> salutes their ear.  
'Tis these that early taint the female soul,  
Instruct the eyes of young coquettes to roll,  
Teach infant cheeks a bidden blush to know,  
And little hearts to flutter at a beau.  
90       "Oft, when the world imagine women stray,  
The Sylphs through mystic mazes guide their way,  
Through all the giddy circle they pursue,  
And old impertinence<sup>o</sup> expel by new.  
What tender maid but must a victim fall  
95       To one man's treat, but for another's ball?  
When Florio speaks, what virgin could withstand,  
If gentle Damon did not squeeze her hand?  
With varying vanities, from every part,

100 They shift the moving toyshop<sup>7</sup> of their heart;  
Where wigs with wigs, with sword-knots sword-knots  
strive,  
Beaux banish beaux, and coaches coaches drive.  
This erring mortals levity may call;  
Oh, blind to truth! the Sylphs contrive it all.  
105 "Of these am I, who thy protection claim,  
A watchful sprite, and Ariel is my name.  
Late, as I ranged the crystal wilds of air,  
In the clear mirror of thy ruling star  
I saw, alas! some dread event impend,  
Ere to the main this morning sun descend,  
110 But Heaven reveals not what, or how, or where:  
Warned by thy Sylph, O pious maid, beware!  
This to disclose is all thy guardian can:  
Beware of all, but most beware of Man!"  
115 He said; when Shock,<sup>8</sup> who thought she slept too  
long,  
Leaped up, and waked his mistress with his tongue.  
'Twas then, Belinda, if report say true,  
Thy eyes first opened on a billet-doux;  
Wounds, charms, and ardors were no sooner read,  
But all the vision vanished from thy head.  
120 And now, unveiled, the toilet stands displayed,  
Each silver vase in mystic order laid.  
First, robed in white, the nymph intent adores,  
With head uncovered, the cosmetic powers.  
A heavenly image in the glass appears;  
125 To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears.  
The inferior priestess, at her altar's side,  
Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride.  
Unnumbered treasures ope at once, and here  
The various offerings of the world appear;  
130 From each she nicely culls with curious toil,  
And decks the goddess with the glittering spoil.

This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,  
 And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.  
 The tortoise here and elephant unite,  
 135 Transformed to combs, the speckled and the white.  
 Here files of pins extend their shining rows,  
 Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles,<sup>9</sup> billet-doux.  
 Now awful<sup>o</sup> Beauty puts on all its arms;  
 The fair each moment rises in her charms,  
 140 Repairs her smiles, awakens every grace,  
 And calls forth all the wonders of her face;  
 Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,  
 And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.  
 The busy Sylphs surround their darling care,  
 145 These set the head, and those divide the hair,  
 Some fold the sleeve, whilst others plait the gown;  
 And Betty's<sup>1</sup> praised for labors not her own.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Summons to a maid.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A watch that chimes the hour and the quarter hour when the stem is pressed down.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Courtiers wore especially fine clothes on the sovereign's birthday.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Rings of bright green grass, which are common in England even in winter, were held to be caused by the round dances of fairies. According to popular belief, fairies skim off the cream from jugs of milk left standing overnight and leave a coin ("silver token") in payment.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The "box" in the theater and the fashionable circular drive ("Ring") in Hyde Park.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A popular card game (see p. 546, n. 3).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The four elements out of which all things were believed to have been made were fire, water, earth, and air. One or

another of these elements was supposed to be predominant in both the physical and the psychological makeup of each human being. In this context they are spoken of as “humors.”[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Shrewish or overbearing women.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A lizardlike animal, in antiquity believed to live in fire. Each element was inhabited by a spirit, as the following lines explain.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pronounced *tay*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Compare with Milton’s *Paradise Lost* 1.427–31; this is one of many allusions to that poem in the *Rape*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Here and after, a fanciful name for a young woman, to be distinguished from the “Nymphs” (water spirits) in line 62.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Emblems of nobility.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A shop stocked with baubles and trifles.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A long-haired poodle, Belinda’s lapdog.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: It has been suggested that Pope intended here not “Bibles,” but “bibelots” (trinkets), but this interpretation has not gained wide acceptance.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Belinda’s maid, the “inferior priestess” mentioned in line 127.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *sedan chair*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *heavenly beings*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *showy images*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *a duchess*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *trifle*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *awe-inspiring*[Return to reference °](#)



## ***Canto 2***

Not with more glories, in the ethereal plain,  
The sun first rises o'er the purpled main,  
Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams  
Launched on the bosom of the silver Thames.  
Fair nymphs and well-dressed youths around her  
5 shone,

But every eye was fixed on her alone.  
On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,  
Which Jews might kiss, and infidels adore.  
Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,  
Quick as her eyes, and as unfixed as those:  
10 Favors to none, to all she smiles extends;  
Oft she rejects, but never once offends.  
Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike,  
And, like the sun, they shine on all alike.  
Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,  
15 Might hide her faults, if belles had faults to hide:  
If to her share some female errors fall,  
Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.

This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,  
Nourished two locks which graceful hung behind  
20 In equal curls, and well conspired to deck  
With shining ringlets her smooth ivory neck.  
Love in these labyrinths his slaves detains,  
And mighty hearts are held in slender chains.  
With hairy springes<sup>2</sup> we the birds betray,  
25 Slight lines of hair surprise the finny prey,  
Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare,  
And beauty draws us with a single hair.

The adventurous Baron the bright locks admired,  
He saw, he wished, and to the prize aspired.  
30 Resolved to win, he meditates the way,

By force to ravish, or by fraud betray;  
For when success a lover's toil attends,  
Few ask if fraud or force attained his ends.

35 For this, ere Phoebus<sup>o</sup> rose, he had implored  
Propitious Heaven, and every power adored,  
But chiefly Love—to Love an altar built,  
Of twelve vast French romances, neatly gilt.  
There lay three garters, half a pair of gloves,  
And all the trophies of his former loves.  
40 With tender billet-doux he lights the pyre,  
And breathes three amorous sighs to raise the fire.  
Then prostrate falls, and begs with ardent eyes  
Soon to obtain, and long possess the prize:  
The powers gave ear, and granted half his prayer,  
45 The rest the winds dispersed in empty air.

But now secure the painted vessel glides,  
The sunbeams trembling on the floating tides,  
While melting music steals upon the sky,  
And softened sounds along the waters die.  
50 Smooth flow the waves, the zephyrs gently play,  
Belinda smiled, and all the world was gay.  
All but the Sylph—with careful thoughts oppressed,  
The impending woe sat heavy on his breast.  
He summons straight his denizens of air;  
55 The lucid squadrons round the sails repair:  
Soft o'er the shrouds aërial whispers breathe  
That seemed but zephyrs to the train beneath.  
Some to the sun their insect-wings unfold,  
Waft on the breeze, or sink in clouds of gold.  
60 Transparent forms too fine for mortal sight,  
Their fluid bodies half dissolved in light,  
Loose to the wind their airy garments flew,  
Thin glittering textures of the filmy dew,  
Dipped in the richest tincture of the skies,  
65 Where light disports in ever-mingling dyes,  
While every beam new transient colors flings,

Colors that change whene'er they wave their wings.  
Amid the circle, on the gilded mast,  
Superior by the head was Ariel placed;  
70 His purple<sup>3</sup> pinions opening to the sun,  
He raised his azure wand, and thus begun:  
    "Ye Sylphs and Sylphids, to your chief give ear!  
Fays, Fairies, Genii, Elves, and Daemons, hear!  
Ye know the spheres and various tasks assigned  
75 By laws eternal to the aërial kind.  
Some in the fields of purest ether play,  
And bask and whiten in the blaze of day.  
Some guide the course of wandering orbs on high,  
Or roll the planets through the boundless sky.  
80 Some less refined, beneath the moon's pale light  
Pursue the stars that shoot athwart the night,  
Or suck the mists in grosser air below,  
Or dip their pinions in the painted bow,<sup>o</sup>  
Or brew fierce tempests on the wintry main,  
85 Or o'er the glebe<sup>o</sup> distill the kindly rain.  
Others on earth o'er human race preside,  
Watch all their ways, and all their actions guide:  
Of these the chief the care of nations own,  
And guard with arms divine the British Throne.  
90 "Our humbler province is to tend the Fair,  
Not a less pleasing, though less glorious care:  
To save the powder from too rude a gale,  
Nor let the imprisoned essences<sup>o</sup> exhale;  
To draw fresh colors from the vernal flowers;  
95 To steal from rainbows e'er they drop in showers  
A brighter wash;<sup>o</sup> to curl their waving hairs,  
Assist their blushes, and inspire their airs,  
Nay oft, in dreams invention we bestow,  
To change a flounce, or add a furbelow.  
100 "This day black omens threat the brightest fair,  
That e'er deserved a watchful spirit's care;

Some dire disaster, or by force or slight,  
But what, or where, the Fates have wrapped in  
night:

105 Whether the nymph shall break Diana's<sup>4</sup> law,  
Or some frail china jar receive a flaw,  
Or stain her honor, or her new brocade,  
Forget her prayers, or miss a masquerade,  
Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball;  
110 Or whether Heaven has doomed that Shock must  
fall.

Haste, then, ye spirits! to your charge repair:  
The fluttering fan be Zephyretta's care;  
The drops<sup>5</sup> to thee, Brillante, we consign;  
And, Momentilla, let the watch be thine;  
115 Do thou, Crispissa,<sup>6</sup> tend her favorite Lock;  
Ariel himself shall be the guard of Shock.

"To fifty chosen Sylphs, of special note,  
We trust the important charge, the petticoat;  
Oft have we known that sevenfold fence to fail,  
Though stiff with hoops, and armed with ribs of  
120 whale.<sup>7</sup>

Form a strong line about the silver bound,  
And guard the wide circumference around.

"Whatever spirit, careless of his charge,  
His post neglects, or leaves the fair at large,  
Shall feel sharp vengeance soon o'ertake his sins,  
125 Be stopped in vials, or transfixed with pins,  
Or plunged in lakes of bitter washes lie,  
Or wedged whole ages in a bodkin's<sup>8</sup> eye;  
Gums and pomatums shall his flight restrain,  
While clogged he beats his silken wings in vain,  
130 Or alum styptics with contracting power  
Shrink his thin essence like a riveled<sup>9</sup> flower:  
Or, as Ixion<sup>1</sup> fixed, the wretch shall feel  
The giddy motion of the whirling mill,

135 In fumes of burning chocolate shall glow,  
 And tremble at the sea that froths below!"

He spoke; the spirits from the sails descend;  
 Some, orb in orb, around the nymph extend;  
 Some thread the mazy ringlets of her hair;  
 Some hang upon the pendants of her ear:

140 With beating hearts the dire event they wait,  
 Anxious, and trembling for the birth of Fate.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Snares (pronounced *sprin-jez*).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In 18th-century poetic diction the word might mean bloodred, purple, or simply (as is likely here) brightly colored. The word derives from Virgil's *Eclogue* 9.40, *purpureum*, and is an example of the Latinate nature of some poetic diction of the period.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Diana was the goddess of chastity.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Diamond earrings. Observe the appropriateness of the names of the Sylphs to their assigned functions.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: From Latin *crispere*, "to curl."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Corsets and the hoops of hoopskirts were made of whalebone.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A blunt needle with a large eye used for drawing ribbon through eyelets in the edging of women's garments.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: To "rivel" is to "contract into wrinkles and corrugations" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In the Greek myth, he was punished in the underworld by being bound on an everturning wheel.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *the sun*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *rainbow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cultivated field*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *perfumes*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cosmetic lotion*[Return to reference °](#)

### ***Canto 3***

Close by those meads, forever crowned with  
flowers,  
Where Thames with pride surveys his rising towers,  
There stands a structure of majestic frame,  
Which from the neighboring Hampton<sup>2</sup> takes its  
name.

5 Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom  
Of foreign tyrants and of nymphs at home;  
Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey,  
Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea.

Hither the heroes and the nymphs resort,  
To taste awhile the pleasures of a court;  
10 In various talk the instructive hours they passed,  
Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last;  
One speaks the glory of the British Queen,  
And one describes a charming Indian screen;  
A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes;  
15 At every word a reputation dies.

Snuff, or the fan, supply each pause of chat,  
With singing, laughing, ogling, and all that.

Meanwhile, declining from the noon of day,  
The sun obliquely shoots his burning ray;  
20 The hungry judges soon the sentence sign,  
And wretches hang that jurymen may dine;  
The merchant from the Exchange returns in peace,  
And the long labors of the toilet cease.

Belinda now, whom thirst of fame invites,  
25 Burns to encounter two adventurous knights,  
At ombre<sup>3</sup> singly to decide their doom,  
And swells her breast with conquests yet to come.  
Straight the three bands prepare in arms to join,  
Each band the number of the sacred nine.

30

Soon as she spreads her hand, the aërial guard  
Descend, and sit on each important card:  
First Ariel perched upon a Matadore,  
Then each according to the rank they bore;  
For Sylphs, yet mindful of their ancient race,  
35 Are, as when women, wondrous fond of place.  
Behold, four Kings in majesty revered,  
With hoary whiskers and a forked beard;  
And four fair Queens whose hands sustain a flower,  
The expressive emblem of their softer power;  
40 Four Knaves in garbs succinct, <sup>o</sup> a trusty band,  
Caps on their heads, and halberts in their hand;  
And parti-colored troops, a shining train,  
Draw forth to combat on the velvet plain.  
The skillful nymph reviews her force with care;  
45 "Let Spades be trumps!" she said, and trumps they  
were.  
Now move to war her sable Matadores,  
In show like leaders of the swarthy Moors.  
Spadillio first, unconquerable lord!  
Led off two captive trumps, and swept the board.  
50 As many more Manillio forced to yield,  
And marched a victor from the verdant field.  
Him Basto followed, but his fate more hard  
Gained but one trump and one plebeian card.  
With his broad saber next, a chief in years,  
55 The hoary Majesty of Spades appears,  
Puts forth one manly leg, to sight revealed,  
The rest his many-colored robe concealed.  
The rebel Knave, who dares his prince engage,  
Proves the just victim of his royal rage.  
60 Even mighty Pam, <sup>4</sup> that kings and queens o'erthrew  
And mowed down armies in the fights of loo,  
Sad chance of war! now destitute of aid,  
Falls undistinguished by the victor Spade.



Thus far both armies to Belinda yield;  
65 Now to the Baron fate inclines the field.  
His warlike amazon her host invades,  
The imperial consort of the crown of Spades.  
The Club's black tyrant first her victim died,  
70 Spite of his haughty mien and barbarous pride.  
What boots <sup>o</sup> the regal circle on his head,  
His giant limbs, in state unwieldy spread?  
That long behind he trails his pompous robe,  
And of all monarchs only grasps the globe?<sup>5</sup>

The Baron now his Diamonds pours apace;  
75 The embroidered King who shows but half his face,  
And his refulgent Queen, with powers combined,  
Of broken troops an easy conquest find.  
Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, in wild disorder seen,  
With throngs promiscuous strew the level green.  
80 Thus when dispersed a routed army runs,  
Of Asia's troops, and Afric's sable sons,  
With like confusion different nations fly,  
Of various habit, and of various dye,  
The pierced battalions disunited fall  
85 In heaps on heaps; one fate o'erwhelms them all.

The Knave of Diamonds tries his wily arts,  
And wins (oh, shameful chance!) the Queen of  
Hearts.  
At this, the blood the virgin's cheek forsook,  
A livid paleness spreads o'er all her look;  
90 She sees, and trembles at the approaching ill,  
Just in the jaws of ruin, and Codille.<sup>6</sup>  
And now (as oft in some distempered state)  
On one nice trick depends the general fate.  
An Ace of Hearts steps forth: the King unseen  
95 Lurked in her hand, and mourned his captive Queen.  
He springs to vengeance with an eager pace,  
And falls like thunder on the prostrate Ace.

The nymph exulting fills with shouts the sky,  
The walls, the woods, and long canals reply.  
100 O thoughtless mortals! ever blind to fate,  
Too soon dejected, and too soon elate:  
Sudden these honors shall be snatched away,  
And cursed forever this victorious day.  
For lo! the board with cups and spoons is  
105 crowned,  
The berries crackle, and the mill turns round;<sup>7</sup>  
On shining altars of Japan<sup>8</sup> they raise  
The silver I the fiery spirits blaze:  
From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide,  
While China's earth receives the smoking tide.  
110 At once they gratify their scent and taste,  
And frequent cups prolong the rich repast.  
Straight hover round the fair her airy band;  
Some, as she sipped, the fuming liquor fanned,  
Some o'er her lap their careful plumes displayed,  
115 Trembling, and conscious of the rich brocade.  
Coffee (which makes the politician wise,  
And see through all things with his half-shut eyes)  
Sent up in vapors to the Baron's brain  
New stratagems, the radiant Lock to gain.  
120 Ah, cease, rash youth! desist ere 'tis too late,  
Fear the just Gods, and think of Scylla's<sup>9</sup> fate!  
Changed to a bird, and sent to flit in air,  
She dearly pays for Nisus' injured hair!  
But when to mischief mortals bend their will,  
125 How soon they find fit instruments of ill!  
Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace  
A two-edged weapon from her shining case:  
So ladies in romance assist their knight,  
Present the spear, and arm him for the fight.  
130 He takes the gift with reverence, and extends  
The little engine on his fingers' ends;

This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,  
As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head.  
Swift to the Lock a thousand sprites repair,  
135 A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair,  
And thrice they twitched the diamond in her ear,  
Thrice she looked back, and thrice the foe drew near.  
Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought  
The close recesses of the virgin's thought;  
140 As on the nosegay in her breast reclined,  
He watched the ideas rising in her mind,  
Sudden he viewed, in spite of all her art,  
An earthly lover lurking at her heart.  
Amazed, confused, he found his power expired,  
145 Resigned to fate, and with a sigh retired.  
The Peer now spreads the glittering forfex<sup>o</sup> wide,  
To enclose the Lock; now joins it, to divide.  
Even then, before the fatal engine closed,  
A wretched Sylph too fondly interposed;  
150 Fate urged the shears, and cut the Sylph in twain  
(But airy substance soon unites again):  
The meeting points the sacred hair dissever  
From the fair head, forever and forever!  
Then flashed the living lightning from her eyes,  
155 And screams of horror rend the affrighted skies.  
Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast,  
When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last;  
Or when rich china vessels fallen from high,  
In glittering dust and painted fragments lie!  
160 "Let wreaths of triumph now my temples twine,"  
The victor cried, "the glorious prize is mine!  
While fish in streams, or birds delight in air,  
Or in a coach and six the British fair,  
As long as *Atalantis*<sup>1</sup> shall be read,  
165 Or the small pillow grace a lady's bed,  
While visits shall be paid on solemn days,

When numerous wax-lights in bright order blaze,  
 While nymphs take treats,<sup>o</sup> or assignations give,  
 So long my honor, name, and praise shall live!  
 170        "What time would spare, from steel receives its  
              date,  
              And monuments, like men, submit to fate!  
              Steel could the labor of the Gods destroy,  
              And strike to dust the imperial towers of Troy;  
              Steel could the works of mortal pride confound,  
 175        And hew triumphal arches to the ground.  
              What wonder then, fair nymph! thy hairs should feel,  
              The conquering force of unresisted steel?"

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Hampton Court, the royal palace, about fifteen miles up the Thames from London. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
 The game of ombre that Belinda plays against the baron and another young man is too complicated for complete explication here. Pope has carefully arranged the cards so that Belinda wins. The baron's hand is strong enough to be a threat, but the third player's is of little account. The hand is played exactly according to the rules of ombre, and Pope's description of the cards is equally accurate. Each player holds nine cards (line 30). The "Matadores" (line 33), when spades are trump, are "Spadillio" (line 49), the ace of spades; "Manillio" (line 51), the two of spades; and "Basto" (line 53), the ace of clubs. Belinda holds all three of these. (For a more complete description of ombre, see *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson, in the Twickenham Edition of Pope's poems, vol. 2, Appendix C.)  
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The knave of clubs, the highest trump in the game of loo. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: In the English deck, only the king of clubs holds an imperial orb.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The term applied to losing a hand at cards.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Coffee is roasted and ground.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Small, lacquered tables. "Altars": suggests the ritualistic character of coffee drinking in Belinda's world.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Scylla, daughter of Nisus, was turned into a sea bird because, for the sake of her love for Minos of Crete, who was besieging her father's city of Megara, she cut from her father's head the purple lock on which his safety depended. She is not the Scylla of "Scylla and Charybdis."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Delarivier Manley's *New Atalantis* (1709) was notorious for its thinly concealed allusions to contemporary scandals.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *girded up*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *avails*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *scissors*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *free refreshments*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***Canto 4***

But anxious cares the pensive nymph oppressed,  
And secret passions labored in her breast.  
Not youthful kings in battle seized alive,  
Not scornful virgins who their charms survive,  
Not ardent lovers robbed of all their bliss,  
5 Not ancient ladies when refused a kiss,  
Not tyrants fierce that unrepenting die,  
Not Cynthia when her manteau's<sup>o</sup> pinned awry,  
E'er felt such rage, resentment, and despair,  
As thou, sad virgin! for thy ravished hair.  
10 For, that sad moment, when the Sylphs withdrew  
And Ariel weeping from Belinda flew,  
Umbriel,<sup>2</sup> a dusky, melancholy sprite  
As ever sullied the fair face of light,  
Down to the central earth, his proper scene,  
15 Repaired to search the gloomy Cave of Spleen.<sup>o</sup>  
Swift on his sooty pinions flits the Gnome,  
And in a vapor reached the dismal dome.  
No cheerful breeze this sullen region knows,  
The dreaded east is all the wind that blows.  
20 Here in a grotto, sheltered close from air,  
And screened in shades from day's detested glare,  
She sighs forever on her pensive bed,  
Pain at her side, and Megrim<sup>o</sup> at her head.  
Two handmaids wait the throne: alike in place  
25 But differing far in figure and in face.  
Here stood Ill-Nature like an ancient maid,  
Her wrinkled form in black and white arrayed;  
With store of prayers for mornings, nights, and  
noons,  
Her hand is filled; her bosom with lampoons.  
30 There Affectation, with a sickly mien,

Shows in her cheek the roses of eighteen,  
Practiced to lisp, and hang the head aside,  
Faints into airs, and languishes with pride,  
On the rich quilt sinks with becoming woe,  
35 Wrapped in a gown, for sickness and for show.  
The fair ones<sup>o</sup> feel such maladies as these,  
When each new nightdress gives a new disease.  
A constant vapor<sup>3</sup> o'er the palace flies,  
Strange phantoms rising as the mists arise;  
40 Dreadful as hermit's dreams in haunted shades,  
Or bright as visions of expiring maids.  
Now glaring fiends, and snakes on rolling spires,<sup>o</sup>  
Pale specters, gaping tombs, and purple fires;  
Now lakes of liquid gold, Elysian scenes,  
45 And crystal domes, and angels in machines.<sup>4</sup>  
Unnumbered throngs on every side are seen  
Of bodies changed to various forms by Spleen.  
Here living teapots stand, one arm held out,  
One bent; the handle this, and that the spout:  
50 A pipkin<sup>o</sup> there, like Homer's tripod,<sup>5</sup> walks;  
Here sighs a jar, and there a goose pie talks;  
Men prove with child, as powerful fancy works,  
And maids, turned bottles, call aloud for corks.  
Safe passed the Gnome through this fantastic  
55 band,  
A branch of healing spleenwort<sup>6</sup> in his hand.  
Then thus addressed the Power: "Hail, wayward  
Queen!  
Who rule the sex to fifty from fifteen:  
Parent of vapors and of female wit,  
Who give the hysteric or poetic fit,  
60 On various tempers act by various ways,  
Make some take physic,<sup>o</sup> others scribble plays;  
Who cause the proud their visits to delay,  
And send the godly in a pet to pray.

65 A nymph there is that all your power disdains,  
And thousands more in equal mirth maintains.  
But oh! if e'er thy Gnome could spoil a grace,  
Or raise a pimple on a beauteous face,  
Like citron-waters<sup>7</sup> matrons' cheeks inflame,  
Or change complexions at a losing game;  
70 If e'er with airy horns<sup>8</sup> I planted heads,  
Or rumpled petticoats, or tumbled beds,  
Or caused suspicion when no soul was rude,  
Or discomposed the headdress of a prude,  
Or e'er to costive lapdog gave disease,  
75 Which not the tears of brightest eyes could ease,  
Hear me, and touch Belinda with chagrin:<sup>9</sup>  
That single act gives half the world the spleen."

The Goddess with a discontented air  
Seems to reject him though she grants his prayer.  
80 A wondrous bag with both her hands she binds,  
Like that where once Ulysses held the winds;<sup>9</sup>  
There she collects the force of female lungs,  
Sighs, sobs, and passions, and the war of tongues.  
A vial next she fills with fainting fears,  
85 Soft sorrows, melting griefs, and flowing tears.  
The Gnome rejoicing bears her gifts away,  
Spreads his black wings, and slowly mounts to day.

Sunk in Thalestris'<sup>1</sup> arms the nymph he found,  
Her eyes dejected and her hair unbound.  
90 Full o'er their heads the swelling bag he rent,  
And all the Furies issued at the vent.  
Belinda burns with more than mortal ire,  
And fierce Thalestris fans the rising fire.  
"O wretched maid!" she spread her hands, and cried  
95 (While Hampton's echoes, "Wretched maid!" replied),  
"Was it for this you took such constant care  
The bodkin, comb, and essence to prepare?  
For this your locks in paper durance bound,



100 For this with torturing irons wreathed around?  
 For this with fillets strained your tender head,  
 And bravely bore the double loads of lead?<sup>2</sup>  
 Gods! shall the ravisher display your hair,  
 While the fops envy, and the ladies stare!  
 Honor forbid! at whose unrivaled shrine  
 105 Ease, pleasure, virtue, all, our sex resign.  
 Methinks already I your tears survey,  
 Already hear the horrid things they say,  
 Already see you a degraded toast,  
 And all your honor in a whisper lost!  
 110 How shall I, then, your helpless fame defend?  
 'Twill then be infamy to seem your friend!  
 And shall this prize, the inestimable prize,  
 Exposed through crystal to the gazing eyes,  
 And heightened by the diamond's circling rays,  
 115 On that rapacious hand forever blaze?  
 Sooner shall grass in Hyde Park Circus grow,  
 And wits take lodgings in the sound of Bow;<sup>3</sup>  
 Sooner let earth, air, sea, to chaos fall,  
 Men, monkeys, lapdogs, parrots, perish all!"  
 120 She said; then raging to Sir Plume repairs,  
 And bids her beau demand the precious hairs  
 (Sir Plume of amber snuffbox justly vain,  
 And the nice conduct of a clouded<sup>o</sup> cane).  
 With earnest eyes, and round unthinking face,  
 125 He first the snuffbox opened, then the case,  
 And thus broke out—"My Lord, why, what the devil!  
 Z—ds! damn the lock! 'fore Gad, you must be civil!  
 Plague on 't! 'tis past a jest—nay prithee, pox!  
 Give her the hair"—he spoke, and rapped his box.  
 130 "It grieves me much," replied the Peer again,  
 "Who speaks so well should ever speak in vain.  
 But by this Lock, this sacred Lock I swear  
 (Which never more shall join its parted hair;

Which never more its honors shall renew,  
135 Clipped from the lovely head where late it grew),  
That while my nostrils draw the vital air,  
This hand, which won it, shall forever wear.”  
He spoke, and speaking, in proud triumph spread  
The long-contended honors<sup>4</sup> of her head.  
140 But Umbriel, hateful Gnome, forbears not so;  
He breaks the vial whence the sorrows flow.  
Then see! the nymph in beauteous grief appears,  
Her eyes half languishing, half drowned in tears;  
On her heaved bosom hung her drooping head,  
145 Which with a sigh she raised, and thus she said:  
“Forever cursed be this detested day,  
Which snatched my best, my favorite curl away!  
Happy! ah, ten times happy had I been,  
If Hampton Court these eyes had never seen!  
150 Yet am not I the first mistaken maid,  
By love of courts to numerous ills betrayed.  
Oh, had I rather unadmired remained  
In some lone isle, or distant northern land;  
Where the gilt chariot never marks the way,  
155 Where none learn ombre, none e’er taste bohea!<sup>5</sup>  
There kept my charms concealed from mortal eye,  
Like roses that in deserts bloom and die.  
What moved my mind with youthful lords to roam?  
Oh, had I stayed, and said my prayers at home!  
160 ’Twas this the morning omens seemed to tell;  
Thrice from my trembling hand the patch box<sup>6</sup> fell;  
The tottering china shook without a wind,  
Nay, Poll sat mute, and Shock was most unkind!  
A Sylph too warned me of the threats of fate,  
165 In mystic visions, now believed too late!  
See the poor remnants of these slighted hairs!  
My hands shall rend what e’en thy rapine spares.  
These in two sable ringlets taught to break,

170        Once gave new beauties to the snowy neck.  
          The sister lock now sits uncouth, alone,  
          And in its fellow's fate foresees its own;  
          Uncurled it hangs, the fatal shears demands,  
          And tempts once more thy sacrilegious hands.  
175        Oh, hadst thou, cruel! been content to seize  
          Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!"

## Endnotes

- Note 2: The name suggests shade and darkness.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Emblematic of "the vapors," a fashionable hypochondria, melancholy, or peevishness.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Mechanical devices used in the theaters for spectacular effects. The catalog of hallucinations draws on the sensational stage effects popular with contemporary audiences.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In the *Iliad* (18.373–77), Vulcan furnishes the gods with self-propelling "tripods" (three-legged stools).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An herb, efficacious against diseases of the spleen. Pope alludes to the golden bough that Aeneas and the Cumaean sibyl carry with them for protection into the underworld in *Aeneid* 6.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Brandy flavored with orange or lemon peel.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The symbol of the cuckold, the man whose wife has been unfaithful to him; here "airy," because they exist only in the jealous suspicions of the husband, the victim of the mischievous Umbriel.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Aeolus (later conceived of as god of the winds) gave Ulysses a bag containing all the winds adverse to his voyage home. When his ship was in sight of Ithaca, his companions

opened the bag and the storms that ensued drove Ulysses far away (*Odyssey* 10.19ff.).[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: The name is borrowed from a queen of the Amazons, hence a fierce and warlike woman.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The frame on which the elaborate coiffures of the day were arranged.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A person born within sound of the bells of St. Mary-le-Bow in Cheapside is said to be a cockney. No fashionable wit would have so vulgar an address.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Ornaments, hence locks; a Latinism.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A costly sort of tea.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: To hold the ornamental patches of court plaster worn on the face by both sexes.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *wrap*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Ill Humor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *headache*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *women*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *coils*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *earthen pot*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *medicine*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ill humor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *marbled, veined*[Return to reference °](#)

## ***Canto 5***

She said: the pitying audience melt in tears.  
But Fate and Jove had stopped the Baron's ears.  
In vain Thalestris with reproach assails,  
For who can move when fair Belinda fails?  
5 Not half so fixed the Trojan<sup>7</sup> could remain,  
While Anna begged and Dido raged in vain.  
Then grave Clarissa graceful waved her fan;  
Silence ensued, and thus the nymph began:  
    "Say, why are beauties praised and honored  
    most,  
10 The wise man's passion, and the vain man's toast?  
Why decked with all that land and sea afford,  
Why angels called, and angel-like adored?  
Why round our coaches crowd the white-gloved  
    beaux,  
Why bows the side box from its inmost rows?  
How vain are all these glories, all our pains,  
15 Unless good sense preserve what beauty gains;  
That men may say when we the front box grace,  
'Behold the first in virtue as in face!'  
Oh! if to dance all night, and dress all day,  
Charmed the smallpox, or chased old age away,  
20 Who would not scorn what housewife's cares  
    produce,  
Or who would learn one earthly thing of use?  
To patch, nay ogle, might become a saint,  
Nor could it sure be such a sin to paint.  
But since, alas! frail beauty must decay,  
25 Curled or uncurled, since locks will turn to gray;  
Since painted, or not painted, all shall fade,  
And she who scorns a man must die a maid;  
What then remains but well our power to use,

30 And keep good humor still whate'er we lose?  
And trust me, dear, good humor can prevail  
When airs, and flights, and screams, and scolding  
fail.  
Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll;  
Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul."<sup>8</sup>  
So spoke the dame, but no applause ensued;  
35 Belinda frowned, Thalestris called her prude.  
"To arms, to arms!" the fierce virago cries,  
And swift as lightning to the combat flies.  
All side in parties, and begin the attack;  
Fans clap, silks rustle, and tough whalebones crack;  
40 Heroes' and heroines' shouts confusedly rise,  
And bass and treble voices strike the skies.  
No common weapons in their hands are found,  
Like Gods they fight, nor dread a mortal wound.  
So when bold Homer makes the Gods engage,  
45 And heavenly breasts with human passions rage;  
'Gainst Pallas, Mars; Latona, Hermes arms;  
And all Olympus rings with loud alarms:  
Jove's thunder roars, heaven trembles all around,  
Blue Neptune storms, the bellowing deeps resound:  
50 Earth shakes her nodding towers, the ground gives  
way,  
And the pale ghosts start at the flash of day!  
Triumphant Umbriel on a sconce's<sup>9</sup> height  
Clapped his glad wings, and sat to view the fight:  
Propped on the bodkin spears, the sprites survey  
55 The growing combat, or assist the fray.  
While through the press enraged Thalestris flies,  
And scatters death around from both her eyes,  
A beau and witling perished in the throng,  
One died in metaphor, and one in song.  
60 "O cruel nymph! a living death I bear,"  
Cried Dapperwit, and sunk beside his chair.

A mournful glance Sir Fopling upwards cast,  
"Those eyes are made so killing"—was his last.  
Thus on Maeander's flowery margin lies  
65 The expiring swan,<sup>1</sup> and as he sings he dies.  
    When bold Sir Plume had drawn Clarissa down,  
Chloe stepped in, and killed him with a frown;  
She smiled to see the doughty hero slain,  
But, at her smile, the beau revived again.  
70      Now Jove suspends his golden scales in air,  
Weighs the men's wits against the lady's hair;  
The doubtful beam long nods from side to side;  
At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside.  
    See, fierce Belinda on the Baron flies,  
75 With more than usual lightning in her eyes;  
Nor feared the chief the unequal fight to try,  
Who sought no more than on his foe to die.  
    But this bold lord with manly strength endued,  
She with one finger and a thumb subdued:  
80 Just where the breath of life his nostrils drew,  
A charge of snuff the wily virgin threw;  
The Gnomes direct, to every atom just,  
The pungent grains of titillating dust.  
Sudden, with starting tears each eye o'erflows,  
85 And the high dome re-echoes to his nose.  
    "Now meet thy fate," incensed Belinda cried,  
And drew a deadly bodkin<sup>2</sup> from her side.  
(The same, his ancient personage to deck,  
Her great-great-grandsire wore about his neck,  
90 In three seal rings; which after, melted down,  
Formed a vast buckle for his widow's gown:  
Her infant grandame's whistle next it grew,  
The bells she jingled, and the whistle blew;  
Then in a bodkin graced her mother's hairs,  
95 Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.)  
    "Boast not my fall," he cried, "insulting foe!

Thou by some other shalt be laid as low.  
Nor think to die dejects my lofty mind:  
All that I dread is leaving you behind!  
100 Rather than so, ah, let me still survive,  
And burn in Cupid's flames—but burn alive."  
"Restore the Lock!" she cries; and all around  
"Restore the Lock!" the vaulted roofs rebound.  
Not fierce Othello in so loud a strain  
105 Roared for the handkerchief that caused his pain.<sup>3</sup>  
But see how oft ambitious aims are crossed,  
And chiefs contend till all the prize is lost!  
The lock, obtained with guilt, and kept with pain,  
In every place is sought, but sought in vain:  
110 With such a prize no mortal must be blessed,  
So Heaven decrees! with Heaven who can contest?  
Some thought it mounted to the lunar sphere,  
Since all things lost on earth are treasured there.  
There heroes' wits are kept in ponderous vases,  
115 And beaux' in snuffboxes and tweezer cases.  
There broken vows and deathbed alms are found,  
And lovers' hearts with ends of riband bound,  
The courtier's promises, and sick man's prayers,  
The smiles of harlots, and the tears of heirs,  
120 Cages for gnats, and chains to yoke a flea,  
Dried butterflies, and tomes of casuistry.  
But trust the Muse—she saw it upward rise,  
Though marked by none but quick, poetic eyes  
(So Rome's great founder to the heavens withdrew,<sup>4</sup>  
125 To Proculus alone confessed in view);  
A sudden star, it shot through liquid air,  
And drew behind a radiant trail of hair.  
Not Berenice's locks first rose so bright,<sup>5</sup>  
The heavens bespangling with disheveled light.  
130 The Sylphs behold it kindling as it flies,  
And pleased pursue its progress through the skies.



This the beau monde shall from the Mall<sup>6</sup> survey,  
 And hail with music its propitious ray.  
 This the blest lover shall for Venus take,  
 135 And send up vows from Rosamonda's Lake.<sup>7</sup>  
 This Partridge<sup>8</sup> soon shall view in cloudless skies,  
 When next he looks through Galileo's eyes;<sup>9</sup>  
 And hence the egregious wizard shall foredoom  
 The fate of Louis, and the fall of Rome.  
 140 Then cease, bright nymph! to mourn thy ravished  
 hair,  
 Which adds new glory to the shining sphere!  
 Not all the tresses that fair head can boast  
 Shall draw such envy as the Lock you lost.  
 For, after all the murders of your eye,  
 145 When, after millions slain, yourself shall die:  
 When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,  
 And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,  
 This Lock the Muse shall consecrate to fame,  
 And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name.  
 150

## 1712 **Endnotes**

1714, 1717

- Note 7: Aeneas, who forsook Dido at the bidding of the gods, despite her reproaches and the supplications of her sister Anna. Virgil compares him to a steadfast oak that withstands a storm (*Aeneid* 4.437–43). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The speech is a close parody of Pope's own translation of the speech of Sarpedon to Glaucus, first published in 1709 and slightly revised in his version of the *Iliad* (12.371–96). [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A candlestick fastened on the wall. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Maeander, a river in what is now Turkey, was famous for its swans. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Here, an ornamental hairpin shaped like a dagger. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: *Othello* 3.4.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Romulus, the “founder” and first king of Rome, was snatched to heaven in a storm cloud while reviewing his army in the Campus Martius (Livy 1.16).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The wife of Ptolemy III dedicated a lock of her hair to the gods to ensure her husband’s safe return from war. It was turned into a constellation.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A walk laid out by Charles II in St. James’s Park (London), a resort for strollers of all sorts.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In St. James’s Park; associated with unhappy lovers.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: John Partridge, an astrologer whose annually published predictions (among them that Louis XIV and the Catholic Church would fall) had been amusingly satirized by Swift and other wits in 1708.[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *telescope*[Return to reference °](#)

**Eloisa to Abelard** Like Ovid's *Sappho to Phaon*, which Pope had translated in his teens, *Eloisa to Abelard* is a heroic epistle: strictly defined, a versified love letter, involving historical persons, which dramatizes the feelings of a woman who has been forsaken. Pope took his subject from one of the most famous affairs of history. Peter Abelard (1079–1142), a brilliant medieval theologian, seduced a young girl, his pupil Heloise; eventually she bore him a child, and they were secretly married. Enraged at the betrayal of trust, and what he regarded as the casting off of Heloise, her uncle Fulbert revenged himself by having Abelard castrated. The lovers separated; each of them entered a monastery and went on to a distinguished career in the church. Yet their greatest fame derives from the letters they are supposed to have exchanged late in their lives (some scholars have cast doubt on the authenticity of Heloise's letters). It is this correspondence, made newly popular by French and English translations of the original Latin, that inspired Pope's poem.

The heroic epistle challenges authors in two ways: they must exert historical imagination, projecting themselves into another time and place; and they must enter the mind and passions of a woman, acting her part, and showing everything from her point of view. Historically, Pope draws on his knowledge of Roman Catholic ritual to envelop Eloisa in a rich medieval atmosphere. The dark Gothic convent, situated in an imaginary landscape of grottos, mountains, and pine forests, embodies the eighteenth-century sense of the romantic: fantastic, legendary, and extravagant. Here Eloisa is cloistered, not only physically but mentally, by religious mysticism that surrounds her with a melancholy as palpable as the image of her lover. The greatest triumph of the poem, however, is psychological. In *Eloisa*, for the only time in his career, Pope tells a story wholly in another's voice. Confused and tormented, the heroine tosses between two kinds of love: an erotic passion for the earthly lover whose memory she cannot quell and the divine, chaste love that must content a nun. Abelard and God, within her fantasy, compete for her soul. Pope brings these internal struggles to the surface by externalizing them in bold dramatic rhetoric, formal and

intense as an aria in an opera (the poem was long a favorite for reading aloud). Eloisa views herself theatrically, if only because, in the letter, she is trying to make Abelard visualize the pathos of her situation. There is literally no way out for her, and at the end of the poem, she can break the static circle of desire and loneliness only by picturing herself in the peace of death. Yet the high reputation of the work, well into the Romantic era, owes less to its theatrics than to its convincing image of a mind in pain. "If you search for passion," Lord Byron wrote more than a century later, "where is it to be found stronger than in the Epistle from Eloisa to Abelard?"

For a depiction of an incident in this famous love story, see Angelika Kauffmann's *The Parting of Abelard from Heloise* (ca. 1778), in the color insert in this volume.

# Eloisa to Abelard

## *The Argument*

Abelard and Eloisa flourished in the twelfth century; they were two of the most distinguished persons of their age in learning and beauty, but for nothing more famous than for their unfortunate passion. After a long course of calamities, they retired each to a several<sup>1</sup> convent, and consecrated the remainder of their days to religion. It was many years after this separation, that a letter of Abelard's to a friend which contained the history of his misfortune, fell into the hands of Eloisa. This awakening all her tenderness, occasioned those celebrated letters (out of which the following is partly extracted)<sup>2</sup> which give so lively a picture of the struggles of grace and nature, virtue and passion.

In these deep solitudes and awful cells,  
Where heavenly-pensive contemplation dwells,  
And ever-musing melancholy reigns;  
What means this tumult in a vestal's<sup>3</sup> veins?  
Why rove my thoughts beyond this last retreat?  
5 Why feels my heart its long-forgotten heat?  
Yet, yet I love!—From Abelard it<sup>4</sup> came,  
And Eloisa yet must kiss the name.

Dear fatal name! rest ever unrevealed,  
Nor pass these lips in holy silence sealed.  
10 Hide it, my heart, within that close disguise,  
Where mixed with God's, his loved idea<sup>5</sup> lies.  
O write it not, my hand—the name appears  
Already written—wash it out, my tears!  
In vain lost Eloisa weeps and prays,  
15 Her heart still dictates, and her hand obeys.

Relentless walls! whose darksome round contains  
Repentant sighs, and voluntary pains:  
Ye rugged rocks! which holy knees have worn;  
Ye grotts and caverns shagged with horrid<sup>o</sup> thorn!  
20 Shrines! where their vigils pale-eyed virgins keep,  
And pitying saints, whose statues learn to weep!<sup>5</sup>  
Tho' cold like you, unmoved, and silent grown,  
I have not yet forgot myself to stone.  
All is not Heaven's while Abelard has part,  
25 Still rebel nature holds out half my heart;  
Nor prayers nor fasts its stubborn pulse restrain,  
Nor tears, for ages taught to flow in vain.  
Soon as thy letters trembling I unclose,  
That well-known name awakens all my woes.  
30 Oh name for ever sad! for ever dear!  
Still breathed in sighs, still ushered with a tear.  
I tremble too, where'er my own I find,  
Some dire misfortune follows close behind.  
Line after line my gushing eyes o'erflow,  
35 Led through a sad variety of woe:  
Now warm in love, now withering in my bloom,  
Lost in a convent's solitary gloom!  
There stern religion quenched the unwilling flame,  
There died the best of passions, love and fame.  
40 Yet write, oh write me all, that I may join  
Griefs to thy griefs, and echo sighs to thine.  
Nor foes nor fortune take this power away.  
And is my Abelard less kind than they?  
Tears still are mine, and those I need not spare,  
45 Love but demands what else were shed in prayer;  
No happier task these faded eyes pursue,  
To read and weep is all they now can do.  
Then share thy pain, allow that sad relief;  
Ah, more than share it! give me all thy grief.  
50 Heaven first taught letters for some wretch's aid,

Some banished lover, or some captive maid;  
They live, they speak, they breathe what love  
inspires,  
Warm from the soul, and faithful to its fires,  
The virgin's wish without her fears impart,  
55 Excuse the blush, and pour out all the heart,  
Speed the soft intercourse from soul to soul,  
And waft a sigh from Indus to the Pole.<sup>6</sup>

Thou knowest how guiltless first I met thy flame,  
When love approached me under friendship's name;  
60 My fancy formed thee of angelic kind,  
Some emanation of the all-beauteous Mind.<sup>7</sup>  
Those smiling eyes, attempering<sup>o</sup> every ray,  
Shone sweetly lambent with celestial day:  
Guiltless I gazed; heaven listened while you sung;  
65 And truths divine came mended from that tongue.<sup>8</sup>  
From lips like those what precept failed to move?  
Too soon they taught me 'twas no sin to love.  
Back through the paths of pleasing sense I ran,  
Nor wished an angel whom I loved a man.  
70 Dim and remote the joys of saints I see,  
Nor envy them, that heaven I lose for thee.

How oft, when pressed to marriage, have I said,  
Curse on all laws but those which love has made!  
Love, free as air, at sight of human ties,  
75 Spreads his light wings, and in a moment flies.  
Let wealth, let honor, wait the wedded dame,  
August her deed, and sacred be her fame;  
Before true passion all those views remove,<sup>o</sup>  
Fame, wealth, and honor! what are you to love?  
80 The jealous god, when we profane his fires,  
Those restless passions in revenge inspires,  
And bids them make mistaken mortals groan,  
Who seek in love for aught but love alone.  
Should at my feet the world's great master fall,  
85

Himself, his throne, his world, I'd scorn 'em all:  
Nor Caesar's empress would I deign to prove;°  
No, make me mistress to the man I love;  
If there be yet another name more free,  
More fond than mistress, make me that to thee!  
90 Oh happy state! when souls each other draw,  
When love is liberty, and nature, law:  
All then is full, possessing, and possessed,  
No craving void left aching in the breast:  
Even thought meets thought ere from the lips it part,  
95 And each warm wish springs mutual from the heart.  
This sure is bliss (if bliss on earth there be)  
And once the lot of Abelard and me.

Alas how changed! what sudden horrors rise!  
A naked lover bound and bleeding lies!  
100 Where, where was Eloise? her voice, her hand,  
Her poniard,° had opposed the dire command.  
Barbarian, stay! that bloody stroke restrain;  
The crime was common,° common be the pain.°  
I can no more; by shame, by rage suppressed,  
105 Let tears, and burning blushes speak the rest.

Canst thou forget that sad, that solemn day,  
When victims at yon altar's foot we lay?  
Canst thou forget what tears that moment fell,  
When, warm in youth, I bade the world farewell?  
110 As with cold lips I kissed the sacred veil,  
The shrines all trembled, and the lamps grew pale:  
Heaven scarce believed the conquest it surveyed,  
And saints with wonder heard the vows I made.  
Yet then, to those dread altars as I drew,  
115 Not on the Cross my eyes were fixed, but you;  
Not grace, or zeal, love only was my call,  
And if I lose thy love, I lose my all.  
Come! with thy looks, thy words, relieve my woe;  
Those still at least are left thee to bestow.  
120 Still on that breast enamored let me lie,



Still drink delicious poison from thy eye,  
Pant on thy lip, and to thy heart be pressed;  
Give all thou canst—and let me dream the rest.  
Ah no! instruct me other joys to prize,  
125 With other beauties charm my partial<sup>9</sup> eyes,  
Full in my view set all the bright abode,  
And make my soul quit Abelard for God.

Ah think at least thy flock deserves thy care,  
Plants of thy hand, and children of thy prayer.  
130 From the false world in early youth they fled,  
By thee to mountains, wilds, and deserts led.  
You raised these hallowed walls;<sup>1</sup> the desert smiled,  
And paradise was opened in the wild.

No weeping orphan saw his father's stores  
135 Our shrines irradiate,<sup>2</sup> or emblaze the floors;  
No silver saints, by dying misers given,  
Here bribed the rage of ill-requited heaven:  
But such plain roofs as piety could raise,  
And only vocal with the Maker's<sup>3</sup> praise.  
140 In these lone walls (their day's eternal bound)  
These moss-grown domes with spiry turrets  
crowned,  
Where awful arches make a noon-day night,  
And the dim windows shed a solemn light,  
Thy eyes diffused a reconciling ray,  
145 And gleams of glory brightened all the day.  
But now no face divine contentment wears,  
'Tis all blank sadness, or continual tears.  
See how the force of others' prayers I try,  
(O pious fraud of amorous charity!)

150 But why should I on others' prayers depend?  
Come thou, my father, brother, husband, friend!  
Ah let thy handmaid, sister, daughter move,  
And all those tender names in one, thy love!  
The darksome pines that o'er yon rocks reclined

Wave high, and murmur to the hollow wind,  
155 The wandering streams that shine between the hills,  
The grots that echo to the tinkling rills,  
The dying gales that pant upon the trees,  
The lakes that quiver to the curling breeze;  
160 No more these scenes my meditation aid,  
Or lull to rest the visionary<sup>4</sup> maid.  
But o'er the twilight groves and dusky caves,  
Long-sounding isles,<sup>5</sup> and intermingled graves,  
Black Melancholy sits, and round her throws  
165 A death-like silence, and a dread repose:  
Her gloomy presence saddens all the scene,  
Shades every flower, and darkens every green,  
Deepens the murmur of the falling floods,  
And breathes a browner horror on the woods.<sup>6</sup>  
170 Yet here for ever, ever must I stay;  
Sad proof how well a lover can obey!  
Death, only death, can break the lasting chain;  
And here, even then, shall my cold dust remain,  
Here all its frailties, all its flames resign,  
175 And wait, till 'tis no sin to mix with thine.  
Ah wretch! believed the spouse of God in vain,  
Confessed within the slave of love and man.  
Assist me, heaven! but whence arose that prayer?  
Sprung it from piety, or from despair?  
180 Even here, where frozen chastity retires,  
Love finds an altar for forbidden fires.  
I ought to grieve, but cannot what I ought;  
I mourn the lover, not lament the fault;  
I view my crime, but kindle at the view,  
185 Repent old pleasures, and solicit new;  
Now turned to heaven, I weep my past offense,  
Now think of thee, and curse my innocence.  
Of all affliction taught a lover yet,  
'Tis sure the hardest science<sup>o</sup> to forget!  
190

How shall I lose the sin, yet keep the sense,<sup>7</sup>  
And love the offender, yet detest the offense?  
How the dear object from the crime remove,  
Or how distinguish penitence from love?  
Unequal task! a passion to resign,  
195 For hearts so touched, so pierced, so lost as mine.  
Ere such a soul regains its peaceful state,  
How often must it love, how often hate!  
How often hope, despair, resent, regret,  
Conceal, disdain—do all things but forget.  
200 But let heaven seize it, all at once 'tis fired,  
Not touched, but rapt; not wakened, but inspired!<sup>8</sup>  
Oh come! oh teach me nature to subdue,  
Renounce my love, my life, my self—and you.  
Fill my fond heart with God alone, for he  
205 Alone can rival, can succeed to thee.

How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!  
The world forgetting, by the world forgot.  
Eternal sun-shine of the spotless mind!  
Each prayer accepted, and each wish resigned;  
210 Labor and rest, that equal periods keep;  
"Obedient slumbers that can wake and weep;"<sup>9</sup>  
Desires composed, affections ever even;  
Tears that delight, and sighs that waft to heaven.  
Grace shines around her with serenest beams,  
215 And whispering angels prompt her golden dreams.  
For her the unfading rose of Eden blooms,  
And wings of seraphs shed divine perfumes,  
For her the Spouse prepares the bridal ring,  
For her white virgins hymenaeals<sup>1</sup> sing,  
220 To sounds of heavenly harps she dies away,  
And melts in visions of eternal day.

Far other dreams my erring soul employ,  
Far other raptures, of unholy joy:  
When at the close of each sad, sorrowing day,

225 Fancy restores what vengeance snatched away,  
Then conscience sleeps, and leaving nature free,  
All my loose soul unbounded springs to thee.  
O curst, dear horrors of all-conscious night!<sup>2</sup>  
How glowing guilt exalts the keen delight!  
230 Provoking daemons all restraint remove,  
And stir within me every source of love.  
I hear thee, view thee, gaze o'er all thy charms,  
And round thy phantom glue my claspings arms.  
I wake—no more I hear, no more I view,  
235 The phantom flies me, as unkind as you.  
I call aloud; it hears not what I say;  
I stretch my empty arms; it glides away:  
To dream once more I close my willing eyes;  
Ye soft illusions, dear deceits, arise!  
240 Alas, no more!—methinks we wandering go  
Through dreary wastes, and weep each other's woe;  
Where round some moldering tower pale ivy creeps,  
And low-browed rocks hang nodding o'er the deeps.  
Sudden you mount! you beckon from the skies;  
245 Clouds interpose, waves roar, and winds arise.  
I shriek, start up, the same sad prospect find,  
And wake to all the griefs I left behind.  
For thee the fates, severely kind, ordain  
A cool suspense<sup>o</sup> from pleasure and from pain;  
250 Thy life a long dead calm of fixed repose;  
No pulse that riots, and no blood that glows.  
Still as the sea, ere winds were taught to blow,  
Or moving spirit bade the waters flow;  
Soft as the slumbers of a saint forgiven,  
255 And mild as opening gleams of promised heaven.  
Come, Abelard! for what hast thou to dread?  
The torch of Venus burns not for the dead.  
Nature stands checked; religion disapproves;  
Even thou art cold—yet Eloisa loves.  
260

Ah hopeless, lasting flames! like those that burn  
To light the dead, and warm the unfruitful urn.<sup>3</sup>

What scenes appear where'er I turn my view?  
The dear ideas, where I fly, pursue,  
265 Rise in the grove, before the altar rise,  
Stain all my soul, and wanton in my eyes!  
I waste the matin lamp in sighs for thee,  
Thy image steals between my God and me,  
Thy voice I seem in every hymn to hear,  
270 With every bead I drop too soft a tear.  
When from the censer clouds of fragrance roll,  
And swelling organs lift the rising soul,  
One thought of thee puts all the pomp to flight,  
Priests, tapers, temples, swim before my sight:  
275 In seas of flame<sup>o</sup> my plunging soul is drowned,  
While altars blaze, and angels tremble round.

While prostrate here in humble grief I lie,  
Kind, virtuous drops just gathering in my eye,  
While praying, trembling, in the dust I roll,  
And dawning grace is opening on my soul:  
280 Come, if thou dar'st, all charming as thou art!  
Oppose thyself to heaven; dispute<sup>o</sup> my heart;  
Come, with one glance of those deluding eyes  
Blot out each bright idea of the skies.  
Take back that grace, those sorrows, and those  
285 tears,  
Take back my fruitless penitence and prayers,  
Snatch me, just mounting, from the blest abode,  
Assist the fiends and tear me from my God!  
No, fly me, fly me! far as pole from pole;  
290 Rise Alps between us! and whole oceans roll!  
Ah come not, write not, think not once of me,  
Nor share one pang of all I felt for thee.  
Thy oaths I quit,<sup>o</sup> thy memory resign,  
Forget, renounce me, hate whate'er was mine.

295 Fair eyes, and tempting looks (which yet I view!)  
Long loved, adored ideas! all adieu!  
O grace serene! oh virtue heavenly fair!  
Divine oblivion of low-thoughted care!  
Fresh blooming hope, gay daughter of the sky!  
And faith, our early immortality!  
300 Enter, each mild, each amicable guest;  
Receive, and wrap me in eternal rest!  
    See in her cell sad Eloisa spread,  
Propped on some tomb, a neighbor of the dead!  
In each low wind methinks a spirit calls,  
305 And more than echoes talk along the walls.  
Here, as I watched the dying lamps around,  
From yonder shrine I heard a hollow sound.  
"Come, sister, come! (it said, or seemed to say)  
Thy place is here, sad sister, come away!  
310 Once like thyself, I trembled, wept, and prayed,  
Love's victim then, tho' now a sainted maid:  
But all is calm in this eternal sleep;  
Here grief forgets to groan, and love to weep,  
Even superstition loses every fear:  
315 For God, not man, absolves our frailties here."  
    I come, I come! prepare your roseate bowers,  
Celestial palms, and ever-blooming flowers.  
Thither, where sinners may have rest, I go,  
Where flames refined in breasts seraphic glow.  
320 Thou, Abelard! the last sad office pay,  
And smooth my passage to the realms of day;  
See my lips tremble, and my eyeballs roll,  
Suck my last breath, and catch my flying soul!  
Ah no—in sacred vestments may'st thou stand,  
325 The hallowed taper trembling in thy hand,  
Present the Cross before my lifted eye,  
Teach me at once, and learn of [me](#) to die.  
Ah then, thy once-loved Eloisa see!  
It will be then no crime to gaze on me.

330 See from my cheek the transient roses fly!  
See the last sparkle languish in my eye!  
Till every motion, pulse, and breath be o'er;  
And even my Abelard be loved no more.  
O death all-eloquent! you only prove  
335 What dust we doat on, when 'tis man we love.  
Then too, when fate shall thy fair frame destroy,  
(That cause of all my guilt, and all my joy)  
In trance ecstatic may thy pangs be drowned,  
Bright clouds descend, and angels watch thee round,  
340 From opening skies may streaming glories shine,  
And saints embrace thee with a love like mine.  
May one kind grave unite each hapless name,<sup>4</sup>  
And graft my love immortal on thy fame!  
Then, ages hence, when all my woes are o'er,  
345 When this rebellious heart shall beat no more;  
If ever chance two wandering lovers brings  
To Paraclete's white walls, and silver springs,  
O'er the pale marble shall they join their heads,  
And drink the falling tears each other sheds,  
350 Then sadly say, with mutual pity moved,  
"Oh may we never love as these have loved!"  
From the full choir when loud Hosannas rise,  
And swell the pomp of dreadful sacrifice,<sup>5</sup>  
Amid that scene if some relenting eye  
355 Glance on the stone where our cold relics lie,  
Devotion's self shall steal a thought from heaven,  
One human tear shall drop, and be forgiven.  
And sure if fate some future bard shall join  
In sad similitude of griefs to mine,  
360 Condemned whole years in absence to deplore,<sup>6</sup>  
And image<sup>o</sup> charms he must behold no more,  
Such if there be, who loves so long, so well,  
Let him our sad, our tender story tell;  
The well-sung woes will sooth my pensive ghost;  
365

He best can paint 'em, who shall feel 'em most.

1717

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Separate.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pope's source was a highly romanticized English version of the letters by John Hughes, published in 1713.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Nun's. Here, as elsewhere, Eloisa substitutes a pagan form for a Christian; nor is she in fact a virgin (vestal).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The letter to which Eloisa is replying.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In damp places, stone "weeps" through condensation.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: From the Indus River, in South Asia, to the North Pole.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: God, conceived (as is proper to a student of philosophy) in Platonic terms.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: He was her preceptor in philosophy and divinity [*Pope's note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Fond; seeing only a part.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: He founded the monastery [*Pope's note*]. Abelard erected the "Paraclete," a modest oratory near Troyes, in 1122; seven years later, when the nunnery of which Heloise was prioress was evicted from its property, he ceded the lands of the Paraclete to her.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Adorn with splendor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: God's or Abelard's.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Given to visions.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sounds reverberate over water as in the *aisles* of a church.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The image of the Goddess Melancholy sitting over the convent, and, as it were, expanding her dreadful wings over its whole circuit, and diffusing her gloom all around it, is truly



sublime, and strongly conceived [*Joseph Warton's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Both perception and sensation.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, when touched, at once rapt; when wakened, at once inspired.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: From *Description of a Religious House* (1648), by Richard Crashaw.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Wedding hymns. Every nun is the bride of Christ, her spouse.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The night knows everything, and Eloisa is conscious (guiltily aware) all through the night.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Perpetual fires were placed in Roman tombs.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Abelard and Eloisa were interred in the same grave, or in monuments adjoining, in the monastery of the Paraclete [Pope's note].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The celebration of the Eucharist (mass).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Lament. Pope, imagining himself imagined by Eloisa, hints that he too is separated from a loved one, perhaps Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who was in Turkey. Pope and Montagu later quarreled, and she appears as Sappho in Epistle 2, *To a Lady*, in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, and in other places in his work.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *mental image*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bristling*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *moderating, assuaging*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *depart*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *try*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dagger*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shared* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *punishment*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *knowledge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *suspension*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *love or hell*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *contend for*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *absolve*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *from*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *imagine, depict*[Return to reference](#) °

**An Essay on Man** Pope's philosophical poem *An Essay on Man* represents the beginnings of an ambitious but never completed plan for what he called his "ethic work," intended to be a large survey of human nature, society, and morals. He dedicated the *Essay* to Henry St. John (pronounced *Sín-jun*), Viscount Bolingbroke (1678–1751), the brilliant, erratic secretary of state in the Tory ministry of 1710–14. After the accession of George I, Bolingbroke fled to France, but he was allowed to return in 1723, settling near Pope at Dawley Farm. The two formed a close friendship and talked through the ideas expressed in the *Essay* and in Bolingbroke's own philosophical writings (some of which are addressed to Pope). But Pope's poem has many sources in the thought of his times and the philosophical tradition at large, and he says himself in the poem's little preface that his intention is to formulate a widely acceptable system of obvious, familiar truths. Pope's "optimism"—his insistence that everything must be "RIGHT" in a universe created and superintended by God—might seem to skip over the tragic elements of experience that much great literary, philosophical, and religious expression confronts. But the strains and contradictions of the poem are themselves deeply revealing about the thinking of Pope and his age, as he both presents and withholds a comprehensive view of the universe and reasons out reason's drastic limitations.

Pope's purpose is to "vindicate the ways of God to man," a phrase that consciously echoes *Paradise Lost* 1.26. Like Milton, Pope faces the problem of the existence of evil in a world presumed to be the creation of a good god. *Paradise Lost* is biblical in content, Christian in doctrine; *An Essay on Man* avoids all specifically Christian doctrines, not because Pope disbelieved them but because "man," the subject of the poem, includes millions who never heard of Christianity and Pope is concerned with the universal. Milton tells a Judeo-Christian story. Pope writes in more philosophical terms.

The *Essay* is divided into four epistles. In the first Pope asserts the essential order and goodness of the universe and the rightness of our place in it. The other epistles deal with how we may emulate in our nature and in society the cosmic harmony revealed in the first

epistle. The second seeks to show how we may attain a psychological harmony that can become the basis of a virtuous life through the cooperation of self-love and the passions (both necessary to our complete humanity) with reason, the controller and director. The third is concerned with the individual in society, which, it teaches, was created through the cooperation of self-love (the egoistic drives that motivate us) and social love (our dependence on others, our inborn benevolence). The fourth is concerned with happiness, which lies within the reach of all for it is dependent on virtue, which becomes possible when—though only when—self-love is transmuted into love of others and love of God. Such, in brief summary, are Pope's main ideas, expressed in many phrases so memorable that they have detached themselves from the poem and become part of daily speech.

# ***From An Essay on Man***

**TO HENRY ST. JOHN, LORD BOLINGBROKE**

*Epistle 1. Of the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to the Universe*

Awake, my St. John! leave all meaner things  
To low ambition, and the pride of kings.  
Let us (since life can little more supply  
Than just to look about us and to die)  
Expatriate free<sup>o</sup> o'er all this scene of man;  
5 A mighty maze! but not without a plan;  
A wild, where weeds and flowers promiscuous shoot,  
Or garden, tempting with forbidden fruit.  
Together let us beat this ample field,<sup>1</sup>  
Try what the open, what the covert yield;  
10 The latent tracts, the giddy heights, explore  
Of all who blindly creep, or sightless soar;  
Eye Nature's walks, shoot folly as it flies,  
And catch the manners living as they rise;  
Laugh where we must, be candid<sup>o</sup> where we can;  
15 But vindicate the ways of God to man.

1. Say first, of God above, or man below,  
What can we reason, but from what we know?  
Of man, what see we but his station here,  
From which to reason, or to which refer?  
20 Through worlds unnumbered though the God be  
known,  
'Tis ours to trace him only in our own.  
He, who through vast immensity can pierce,  
See worlds on worlds compose one universe,

25      Observe how system into system runs,  
What other planets circle other suns,  
What varied being peoples every star,  
May tell why Heaven has made us as we are.  
But of this frame<sup>o</sup> the bearings, and the ties,  
30      The strong connections, nice dependencies,  
Gradations just, has thy pervading soul  
Looked through? or can a part contain the whole?  
Is the great chain, that draws all to agree,  
And drawn supports, upheld by God, or thee?<sup>2</sup>

35      2. Presumptuous man! the reason wouldst thou  
find,  
Why formed so weak, so little, and so blind?  
First, if thou canst, the harder reason guess,  
Why formed no weaker, blinder, and no less!  
Ask of thy mother earth, why oaks are made  
Taller or stronger than the weeds they shade?  
40      Or ask of yonder argent fields above,  
Why Jove's satellites<sup>3</sup> are less than Jove?  
Of systems possible, if 'tis confessed  
That Wisdom Infinite must form the best,  
Where all must full or not coherent be,  
45      And all that rises, rise in due degree;  
Then, in the scale of reasoning life, 'tis plain,  
There must be, somewhere, such a rank as man:  
And all the question (wrangle e'er so long)  
Is only this, if God has placed him wrong?  
50      Respecting man, whatever wrong we call,  
May, must be right, as relative to all.  
In human works, though labored on with pain,  
A thousand movements scarce one purpose gain;  
In God's, one single can its end produce;  
55      Yet serves to second too some other use.  
So man, who here seems principal alone,

Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown,  
Touches some wheel, or verges to some goal;  
'Tis but a part we see, and not a whole.  
60       When the proud steed shall know why man  
          restrains  
His fiery course, or drives him o'er the plains;  
When the dull ox, why now he breaks the clod,  
Is now a victim, and now Egypt's god:<sup>4</sup>  
Then shall man's pride and dullness comprehend  
65       His actions', passions', being's use and end;  
Why doing, suffering, checked, impelled; and why  
This hour a slave, the next a deity.  
          Then say not man's imperfect, Heaven in fault;  
Say rather, man's as perfect as he ought;  
70       His knowledge measured to his state and place,  
His time a moment, and a point his space.  
If to be perfect in a certain sphere,<sup>5</sup>  
What matter, soon or late, or here or there?  
The blest today is as completely so,  
75       As who began a thousand years ago.

3. Heaven from all creatures hides the book of  
Fate,  
All but the page prescribed, their present state:  
From brutes what men, from men what spirits know:  
Or who could suffer being here below?  
80       The lamb thy riot<sup>o</sup> dooms to bleed today,  
Had he thy reason, would he skip and play?  
Pleased to the last, he crops the flowery food,  
And licks the hand just raised to shed his blood.  
O blindness to the future! kindly given,  
85       That each may fill the circle marked by Heaven:  
Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,  
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,  
Atoms or systems<sup>o</sup> into ruin hurled,

And now a bubble burst, and now a world.  
90        Hope humbly then; with trembling pinions soar;  
Wait the great teacher Death, and God adore!  
What future bliss, he gives not thee to know,  
But gives that hope to be thy blessing now.  
Hope springs eternal in the human breast:  
95        Man never is, but always to be blest:  
The soul, uneasy and confined from home,  
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.  
      Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutored mind  
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;  
100        His soul proud Science never taught to stray  
Far as the solar walk, or milky way;  
Yet simple Nature to his hope has given,  
Behind the cloud-topped hill, an humbler heaven;  
Some safer world in depth of woods embraced,  
105        Some happier island in the watery waste,  
Where slaves once more their native land behold,  
No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold!  
To be, contents his natural desire,  
He asks no angel's wing, no seraph's fire;  
110        But thinks, admitted to that equal<sup>o</sup> sky,  
His faithful dog shall bear him company.

4. Go, wiser thou! and, in thy scale of sense,  
Weigh thy opinion against Providence;  
Call imperfection what thou fancy'st such,  
115        Say, here he gives too little, there too much;  
Destroy all creatures for thy sport or gust,<sup>6</sup>  
Yet cry, if man's unhappy, God's unjust;  
If man alone engross not Heaven's high care,  
Alone made perfect here, immortal there:  
120        Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,<sup>7</sup>  
Rejudge his justice, be the God of God!  
      In pride, in reasoning pride, our error lies;



All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies.  
Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes,  
125 Men would be angels, angels would be gods.  
Aspiring to be gods, if angels fell,  
Aspiring to be angels, men rebel:  
And who but wishes to invert the laws  
Of order, sins against the Eternal Cause.  
130

5. Ask for what end the heavenly bodies shine,  
Earth for whose use? Pride answers, "'Tis for mine:  
For me kind Nature wakes her genial power,  
Suckles each herb, and spreads out every flower;  
Annual for me, the grape, the rose renew  
135 The juice nectareous, and the balmy dew;  
For me, the mine a thousand treasures brings;  
For me, health gushes from a thousand springs;  
Seas roll to waft me, suns to light me rise;  
My footstool earth, my canopy the skies."  
140

But errs not Nature from this gracious end,  
From burning suns when livid deaths descend,  
When earthquakes swallow, or when tempests  
sweep  
Towns to one grave, whole nations to the deep?  
"No," 'tis replied, "the first Almighty Cause  
145 Acts not by partial, but by general laws;  
The exceptions few; some change since all began,  
And what created perfect?"—Why then man?  
If the great end be human happiness,  
Then Nature deviates; and can man do less?  
150 As much that end a constant course requires  
Of showers and sunshine, as of man's desires;  
As much eternal springs and cloudless skies,  
As men forever temperate, calm, and wise.  
If plagues or earthquakes break not Heaven's  
155 design,  
Why then a Borgia, or a Catiline?<sup>8</sup>

Who knows but he whose hand the lightning forms,  
Who heaves old ocean, and who wings the storms,  
Pours fierce ambition in a Caesar's mind,  
Or turns young Ammon<sup>9</sup> loose to scourge mankind?  
160 From pride, from pride, our very reasoning springs;  
Account for moral, as for natural things:  
Why charge we Heaven in those, in these acquit?  
In both, to reason right is to submit.  
Better for us, perhaps, it might appear,  
165 Were there all harmony, all virtue here;  
That never air or ocean felt the wind;  
That never passion discomposed the mind:  
But ALL subsists by elemental strife;  
And passions are the elements of life.  
170 The general ORDER, since the whole began,  
Is kept in Nature, and is kept in man.

6. What would this man? Now upward will he  
soar,  
And little less than angel, would be more;  
Now looking downwards, just as grieved appears  
175 To want the strength of bulls, the fur of bears.  
Made for his use all creatures if he call,  
Say what their use, had he the powers of all?  
Nature to these, without profusion, kind,  
The proper organs, proper powers assigned;  
180 Each seeming want compensated of course,<sup>o</sup>  
Here with degrees of swiftness, there of force;  
All in exact proportion to the state;  
Nothing to add, and nothing to abate.  
Each beast, each insect, happy in its own;  
185 Is Heaven unkind to man, and man alone?  
Shall he alone, whom rational we call,  
Be pleased with nothing, if not blessed with all?  
The bliss of man (could pride that blessing find)  
Is not to act or think beyond mankind;

190 No powers of body or of soul to share,  
But what his nature and his state can bear.  
Why has not man a microscopic eye?  
For this plain reason, man is not a fly.  
Say what the use, were finer optics given,  
195 To inspect a mite, not comprehend the heaven?  
Or touch, if tremblingly alive all o'er,  
To smart and agonize at every pore?  
Or quick effluvia<sup>1</sup> darting through the brain,  
Die of a rose in aromatic pain?  
200 If nature thundered in his opening ears,  
And stunned him with the music of the spheres,  
How would he wish that Heaven had left him still  
The whispering zephyr, and the purling rill?  
Who finds not Providence all good and wise,  
205 Alike in what it gives, and what denies?

7. Far as creation's ample range extends,  
The scale of sensual,<sup>o</sup> mental powers ascends:  
Mark how it mounts, to man's imperial race,  
From the green myriads in the peopled grass:  
210 What modes of sight betwixt each wide extreme,  
The mole's dim curtain, and the lynx's beam:<sup>2</sup>  
Of smell, the headlong lioness between,  
And hound sagacious<sup>o</sup> on the tainted green:  
Of hearing, from the life that fills the flood,  
215 To that which warbles through the vernal wood:  
The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine!  
Feels at each thread, and lives along the line:  
In the nice<sup>o</sup> bee, what sense so subtly true  
From poisonous herbs extracts the healing dew:  
220 How instinct varies in the groveling swine,  
Compared, half-reasoning elephant, with thine!  
'Twixt that, and reason, what a nice barrier,<sup>3</sup>  
Forever separate, yet forever near!

225 Remembrance and reflection how allied;  
What thin partitions sense from thought divide:  
And middle natures, how they long to join,  
Yet never pass the insuperable line!  
Without this just gradation, could they be  
230 Subjected, these to those, or all to thee?  
The powers of all subdued by thee alone,  
Is not thy reason all these powers in one?

8. See, through this air, this ocean, and this  
earth,  
All matter quick, and bursting into birth.  
Above, how high progressive life may go!  
235 Around, how wide! how deep extend below!  
Vast Chain of Being! which from God began,  
Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,  
Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,  
No glass can reach! from Infinite to thee,  
240 From thee to nothing.—On superior powers  
Were we to press, inferior might on ours:  
Or in the full creation leave a void,  
Where, one step broken, the great scale's destroyed:  
From Nature's chain whatever link you strike,  
245 Tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.

And, if each system in gradation roll  
Alike essential to the amazing whole,  
The least confusion but in one, not all  
That system only, but the whole must fall.  
250 Let earth unbalanced from her orbit fly,  
Planets and suns run lawless through the sky,  
Let ruling angels from their spheres be hurled,  
Being on being wrecked, and world on world,  
Heaven's whole foundations to their center nod,  
255 And Nature tremble to the throne of God:  
All this dread ORDER break—for whom? for thee?  
Vile worm!—oh, madness, pride, impiety!

9. What if the foot, ordained the dust to tread,  
Or hand, to toil, aspired to be the head?  
260 What if the head, the eye, or ear repined  
To serve mere engines to the ruling Mind?<sup>4</sup>  
Just as absurd, for any part to claim  
To be another, in this general frame.  
Just as absurd, to mourn the tasks or pains,  
265 The great directing MIND of ALL ordains.

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,  
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;  
That, changed through all, and yet in all the same,  
Great in the earth, as in the ethereal frame,  
270 Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,  
Glow in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,  
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,  
Spreads undivided, operates unspent,  
Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,  
275 As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart;  
As full, as perfect, in vile man that mourns,  
As the rapt seraph that adores and burns;  
To him no high, no low, no great, no small;  
He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all.

280  
10. Cease then, nor ORDER imperfection name:  
Our proper bliss depends on what we blame.  
Know thy own point: this kind, this due degree  
Of blindness, weakness, Heaven bestows on thee.  
Submit—In this, or any other sphere,  
285 Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear:  
Safe in the hand of one disposing Power,  
Or in the natal, or the mortal hour.  
All Nature is but art, unknown to thee;  
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;  
290 All discord, harmony not understood;  
All partial evil, universal good:  
And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,

One truth is clear: Whatever IS, is RIGHT.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Pope and Bolingbroke will try to drive truth into the open, like hunters beating the bushes for game.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: For the chain of being, see Addison's *Spectator* 519 (p. 130) and lines 207–58.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In his *Dictionary*, Johnson notes and condemns Pope's giving this word four syllables, as in Latin.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Egyptians worshiped a bull called Apis.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, in one's "state and place."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "Sense of tasting" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Symbols of judgment and punishment.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lucius Sergius Catiline (ca. 108–62 B.C.E.), an ambitious, greedy, and cruel conspirator against the Roman state, was denounced in Cicero's famous orations before the senate and in the Forum. The Italian Renaissance family the Borgias was notorious for its ruthless lust for power, cruelty, rapaciousness, treachery, and murder (especially by poisoning). Cesare Borgia (1476–1507), son of Pope Alexander VI, is here referred to.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, Alexander the Great.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: According to the philosophy of Epicurus (adopted by Robert Boyle, the chemist, and other 17th-century scientists), the senses are stirred to perception by being bombarded through the pores by steady streams of "effluvia," incredibly thin and tiny—but material—images of the objects that surround us.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: One of several early theories of vision held that the eye casts a beam of light that makes objects visible.[Return to](#)

[reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Pronounced *ba-réer*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See 1 Corinthians 12:14–26.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *range freely*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *favorably disposed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the universe*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *feast*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *solar systems*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *impartial*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as a matter of course*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sensory*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *quick of scent*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *exact, accurate*[Return to reference °](#)

**From *Epistle 2. Of the Nature and State of Man with Respect to Himself, as an Individual***

1. Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;<sup>◦</sup>  
The proper study of mankind is Man.  
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,  
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:  
5 With too much knowledge for the skeptic side,  
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,  
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest,  
In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;  
In doubt his mind or body to prefer,  
10 Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;  
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,  
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:  
Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;  
Still by himself abused, or disabused;  
15 Created half to rise, and half to fall;  
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;  
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled:  
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

\* \* \*

**Notes**

1733

- <sup>◦</sup>: judge [Return to reference](#) <sup>◦</sup>



**Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot** Dr. John Arbuthnot (1667–1735), to whom Pope addressed his best-known verse epistle, was distinguished both as a physician and as a man of wit. He had been one of the liveliest members of the Martinus Scriblerus Club, helping his friends create the character and shape the career of the learned pedant whose memoirs the club had undertaken to write.

Pope had long been meditating such a poem, which was to be both an attack on his detractors and a defense of his own character and career. In his usual way, he had jotted down hints, lines, couplets, and fragments over a period of two decades, but the poem might never have been completed had it not been for two events: Arbuthnot, from his deathbed, wrote to urge Pope to continue his abhorrence of vice and to express it in his writings and, during 1733, Pope was the victim of two bitter attacks by “persons of rank and fortune,” as the Advertisement has it. The “Verses Addressed to the Imitator of Horace” was the work of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, helped by her friend Lord Hervey (pronounced *Harvey*), a close friend and confidant of Queen Caroline. “An Epistle to a Doctor of Divinity from a Nobleman at Hampton Court” was the work of Lord Hervey alone. Montagu had provocation enough, especially in Pope’s recent reference to her in “The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace,” lines 83–84; and Pope had occasionally referred to Hervey as “Lord Fanny,” using the British slang term for female genitalia to mock Hervey’s non-normative gender identity, which was widely remarked in his social circle. The two attacks goaded Pope into action, and he completed the poem by the end of the summer of 1734.

The *Epistle* is the most brilliant and daring execution of the techniques that Pope used in many of the autobiographical poems of the 1730s. He presents himself in a theatrical array of postures: the comically exaggerating complainer, the admired man of genius, the true friend, the unpretentiously honest man, the satirist-hero of his country, the “manly” defender of virtue, the tender son mothering his own mother. Part of what cements this mixture is the verve with which he modulates from role to role, implying that none of them

exhaustively defines him. Pope tries to force the reader to take sides, for him and what he claims to represent, or against him. Thus reading becomes an ethical exercise; readers must make up their own minds about his moral superiority, his exquisitely crafted portraits of his enemies, his social self-positioning, or his self-righteous politics. Pope solicits our judgment of his character and his professed ideals, and no other poet in English does so with so much artistic energy, resourcefulness, and success.

It is not clear that Pope intended the poem to be thought of as a dialogue, as it has usually been printed since Warburton's edition of 1751. The original edition, while suggesting interruptions in the flow of the monologue, kept entirely to the form of a letter. The introduction of the friend, who speaks from time to time, converts the original letter into a dramatic dialogue.

# Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot

## *Advertisement*

TO THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THIS *Epistle*

This paper is a sort of bill of complaint, begun many years since, and drawn up by snatches, as the several occasions offered. I had no thoughts of publishing it, till it pleased some persons of rank and fortune (the authors of *Verses to the Imitator of Horace*, and of an *Epistle to a Doctor of Divinity from a Nobleman at Hampton Court*) to attack, in a very extraordinary manner, not only my writings (of which, being public, the public is judge) but my person, morals, and family, whereof, to those who know me not, a truer information may be requisite. Being divided between the necessity to say something of myself, and my own laziness to undertake so awkward a task, I thought it the shortest way to put the last hand to<sup>1</sup> this epistle. If it have anything pleasing, it will be that by which I am most desirous to please, the truth and the sentiment; and if anything offensive, it will be only to those I am least sorry to offend, the vicious or the ungenerous.

Many will know their own pictures in it, there being not a circumstance but what is true; but I have, for the most part, spared their names, and they may escape being laughed at, if they please.

I would have some of them know, it was owing to the request of the learned and candid friend to whom it is inscribed, that I make not as free use of theirs as they have done of mine. However, I shall have this advantage, and honor, on my side, that whereas, by their proceeding, any abuse may be directed at any man, no injury can possibly be done by mine, since a nameless character can never be found out, but by its truth and likeness. P.

P. Shut, shut the door, good John!<sup>2</sup> (fatigued, I said),

Tie up the knocker, say I'm sick, I'm dead.  
The Dog Star<sup>3</sup> rages! nay 'tis past a doubt  
All Bedlam,<sup>4</sup> or Parnassus, is let out:  
Fire in each eye, and papers in each hand,  
They rave, recite, and madden round the land.  
What walls can guard me, or what shades can hide?  
They pierce my thickets, through my grot<sup>5</sup> they glide,  
By land, by water, they renew the charge,  
They stop the chariot, and they board the barge.  
No place is sacred, not the church is free;  
Even Sunday shines no Sabbath day to me:  
Then from the Mint<sup>6</sup> walks forth the man of rhyme,  
Happy! to catch me just at dinner time.  
Is there a parson, much bemused in beer,  
A maudlin poetess, a rhyming peer,  
A clerk foredoomed his father's soul to cross,  
Who pens a stanza when he should engross?<sup>7</sup>  
Is there who, locked from ink and paper,<sup>8</sup> scrawls  
With desperate charcoal round his darkened walls?  
All fly to Twit'nam,<sup>9</sup> and in humble strain  
Apply to me to keep them mad or vain.  
Arthur,<sup>1</sup> whose giddy son neglects the laws,  
Imputes to me and my damned works the cause:  
Poor Cornus<sup>2</sup> sees his frantic wife elope,  
And curses wit, and poetry, and Pope.  
Friend to my life (which did not you prolong,  
The world had wanted<sup>o</sup> many an idle song)  
What drop or nostrum<sup>o</sup> can this plague remove?  
Or which must end me, a fool's wrath or love?  
A dire dilemma! either way I'm sped,<sup>o</sup>  
If foes, they write, if friends, they read me dead.  
Seized and tied down to judge, how wretched I!  
Who can't be silent, and who will not lie.  
To laugh were want of goodness and of grace,  
And to be grave exceeds all power of face.

I sit with sad civility, I read  
With honest anguish and an aching head,  
And drop at last, but in unwilling ears,  
This saving counsel, "Keep your piece nine years."<sup>3</sup>

"Nine years!" cries he, who high in Drury Lane,<sup>4</sup>  
Lulled by soft zephyrs through the broken pane,  
Rhymes ere he wakes, and prints before term<sup>5</sup> ends,  
Obliged by hunger and request of friends:

"The piece, you think, is incorrect? why, take it,  
I'm all submission, what you'd have it, make it."

Three things another's modest wishes bound,  
My friendship, and a prologue,<sup>6</sup> and ten pound.

Pitholeon<sup>7</sup> sends to me: "You know his Grace,  
I want a patron; ask him for a place."

Pitholeon libeled me—"but here's a letter  
Informs you, sir, 'twas when he knew no better.

Dare you refuse him? Curl<sup>8</sup> invites to dine,  
He'll write a *Journal*, or he'll turn divine."<sup>9</sup>

Bless me! a packet.—"'Tis a stranger sues,<sup>o</sup>  
A virgin tragedy, an orphan Muse."

If I dislike it, "Furies, death, and rage!"

If I approve, "Commend it to the stage."

There (thank my stars) my whole commission ends,  
The players and I are, luckily, no friends.

Fired that the house<sup>o</sup> reject him, "'Sdeath, I'll print it,  
And shame the fools—Your interest, sir, with Lintot!"<sup>1</sup>

Lintot, dull rogue, will think your price too much.

"Not, sir, if you revise it, and retouch."

All my demurs but double his attacks;

At last he whispers, "Do; and we go snacks."<sup>o</sup>

Glad of a quarrel, straight I clap the door,

"Sir, let me see your works and you no more."

'Tis sung, when Midas' ears began to spring  
(Midas, a sacred person and a king),  
His very minister who spied them first,

(Some say his queen) was forced to speak, or burst.<sup>2</sup>  
And is not mine, my friend, a sorer case,  
When every coxcomb perks them in my face?

A. Good friend, forbear! you deal in dangerous things.  
I'd never name queens, ministers, or kings;  
Keep close to ears,<sup>3</sup> and those let asses prick;  
'Tis nothing—P. Nothing? if they bite and kick?  
Out with it, *Dunciad*! let the secret pass,  
That secret to each fool, that he's an ass:  
The truth once told (and wherefore should we lie?)  
The queen of Midas slept, and so may I.

You think this cruel? take it for a rule,  
No creature smarts so little as a fool.  
Let peals of laughter, Codrus!<sup>3</sup> round thee break,  
Thou unconcerned canst hear the mighty crack.  
Pit, box, and gallery in convulsions hurled,  
Thou stand'st unshook amidst a bursting world.  
Who shames a scribbler? break one cobweb through,  
He spins the slight, self-pleasing thread anew:  
Destroy his fib or sophistry, in vain;  
The creature's at his dirty work again,  
Throned in the center of his thin designs,  
Proud of a vast extent of flimsy lines.  
Whom have I hurt? has poet yet or peer  
Lost the arched eyebrow or Parnassian sneer?  
And has not Colley<sup>4</sup> still his lord and whore?  
His butchers Henley?<sup>5</sup> his freemasons Moore?  
Does not one table Bavius still admit?  
Still to one bishop Philips<sup>6</sup> seem a wit?  
Still Sappho<sup>7</sup>—A. Hold! for god's sake—you'll offend.  
No names—be calm—learn prudence of a friend.  
I too could write, and I am twice as tall;  
But foes like these!—P. One flatterer's worse than all.  
Of all mad creatures, if the learn'd are right,  
It is the slaver kills, and not the bite.

A fool quite angry is quite innocent:  
Alas! 'tis ten times worse when they repent.

One dedicates in high heroic prose,  
And ridicules beyond a hundred foes;  
One from all Grub Street<sup>8</sup> will my fame defend,  
And, more abusive, calls himself my friend.  
This prints my letters,<sup>9</sup> that expects a bribe,  
And others roar aloud, "Subscribe, subscribe!"<sup>1</sup>

There are, who to my person pay their court:  
I cough like Horace,<sup>2</sup> and, though lean, am short;  
Ammon's great son<sup>3</sup> one shoulder had too high,  
Such Ovid's nose,<sup>4</sup> and "Sir! you have an eye—"   
Go on, obliging creatures, make me see  
All that disgraced my betters met in me.  
Say for my comfort, languishing in bed,  
"Just so immortal Maro<sup>o</sup> held his head":  
And when I die, be sure you let me know  
Great Homer died three thousand years ago.

Why did I write? what sin to me unknown  
Dipped me in ink, my parents', or my own?  
As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,  
I lisped in numbers,<sup>o</sup> for the numbers came.  
I left no calling for this idle trade,  
No duty broke, no father disobeyed.  
The Muse but served to ease some friend, not wife,  
To help me through this long disease, my life,  
To second, Arbuthnot! thy art and care,  
And teach the being you preserved, to bear.<sup>o</sup>

A. But why then publish? P. Granville the polite,  
And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;  
Well-natured Garth inflamed with early praise,  
And Congreve loved, and Swift endured my lays;  
The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield, read;

Even mitred Rochester would nod the head,  
And St. John's self (great Dryden's friends before)  
With open arms received one poet more.<sup>5</sup>  
Happy my studies, when by these approved!  
Happier their author, when by these beloved!  
From these the world will judge of men and books,  
Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cookes.<sup>6</sup>

Soft were my numbers; who could take offense  
While pure description held the place of sense?  
Like gentle Fanny's<sup>7</sup> was my flowery theme,  
A painted mistress, or a purling stream.  
Yet then did Gildon draw his venal quill;<sup>8</sup>  
I wished the man a dinner, and sat still.  
Yet then did Dennis<sup>9</sup> rave in furious fret;  
I never answered, I was not in debt.  
If want provoked, or madness made them print,  
I waged no war with Bedlam or the Mint.

Did some more sober critic come abroad?  
If wrong, I smiled; if right, I kissed the rod.  
Pains, reading, study are their just pretense,  
And all they want is spirit, taste, and sense.  
Commas and points they set exactly right,  
And 'twere a sin to rob them of their mite.  
Yet ne'er one sprig of laurel graced these ribalds,  
From slashing Bentley down to piddling Tibbalds.<sup>1</sup>  
Each wight who reads not, and but scans and spells,  
Each word-catcher that lives on syllables,  
Even such small critics some regard may claim,  
Preserved in Milton's or in Shakespeare's name.  
Pretty! in amber to observe the forms  
Of hairs, or straws, or dirt, or grubs, or worms!  
The things, we know, are neither rich nor rare,  
But wonder how the devil they got there.

Were others angry? I excused them too;  
Well might they rage; I gave them but their due.



A man's true merit 'tis not hard to find;  
But each man's secret standard in his mind,  
That casting weight<sup>2</sup> pride adds to emptiness,  
This, who can gratify? for who can guess?  
The bard<sup>3</sup> whom pilfered pastorals renown,  
Who turns a Persian tale for half a crown,  
Just writes to make his barrenness appear,  
And strains from hard-bound brains eight lines a year:  
He, who still wanting, though he lives on theft,  
Steals much, spends little, yet has nothing left;  
And he who now to sense, now nonsense leaning,  
Means not, but blunders round about a meaning:  
And he whose fustian's so sublimely bad,  
It is not poetry, but prose run mad:  
All these, my modest satire bade translate,  
And owned that nine such poets made a Tate.<sup>4</sup>  
How did they fume, and stamp, and roar, and chafe!  
And swear, not Addison himself was safe.

Peace to all such! but were there one whose fires  
True Genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires;  
Blessed with each talent and each art to please,  
And born to write, converse, and live with ease:  
Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,  
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne;<sup>5</sup>  
View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,  
And hate for arts that caused himself to rise;  
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,  
And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;  
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,  
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;  
Alike reserved to blame or to commend,  
A timorous foe, and a suspicious friend;  
Dreading even fools; by flatterers besieged,  
And so obliging that he ne'er obliged;  
Like Cato, give his little senate<sup>6</sup> laws,

And sit attentive to his own applause;  
While wits and Templars<sup>o</sup> every sentence raise,  
And wonder with a foolish face of praise—  
Who but must laugh, if such a man there be?  
Who would not weep, if Atticus<sup>z</sup> were he?

What though my name stood rubric<sup>o</sup> on the walls  
Or plastered posts, with claps,<sup>o</sup> in capitals?  
Or smoking forth, a hundred hawkers' load,  
On wings of winds came flying all abroad?  
I sought no homage from the race that write;  
I kept, like Asian monarchs, from their sight:  
Poems I heeded (now berhymed so long)  
No more than thou, great George! a birthday song.  
I ne'er with wits or witlings passed my days  
To spread about the itch of verse and praise;  
Nor like a puppy daggled through the town  
To fetch and carry sing-song up and down;  
Nor at rehearsals sweat, and mouthed, and cried,  
With handkerchief and orange at my side;  
But sick of fops, and poetry, and prate,  
To Bufo left the whole Castalian<sup>8</sup> state.

Proud as Apollo on his forkèd hill,<sup>9</sup>  
Sat full-blown Bufo, puffed<sup>o</sup> by every quill;<sup>o</sup>  
Fed with soft dedication all day long,  
Horace and he went hand in hand in song.  
His library (where busts of poets dead  
And a true Pindar stood without a head)  
Received of wits an undistinguished race,  
Who first his judgment asked, and then a place:  
Much they extolled his pictures, much his seat,<sup>1</sup>  
And flattered every day, and some days eat:  
Till grown more frugal in his riper days,  
He paid some bards with port, and some with praise;  
To some a dry rehearsal was assigned,  
And others (harder still) he paid in kind.

Dryden alone (what wonder?) came not nigh;  
Dryden alone escaped this judging eye:  
But still the great have kindness in reserve;  
He helped to bury whom he helped to starve.

May some choice patron bless each gray goose quill!  
May every Bavius have his Bufo still!  
So when a statesman wants a day's defense,  
Or envy holds a whole week's war with sense,  
Or simple pride for flattery makes demands,  
May dunce by dunce be whistled off my hands!  
Blessed be the great! for those they take away,  
And those they left me—for they left me Gay;<sup>2</sup>  
Left me to see neglected genius bloom,  
Neglected die, and tell it on his tomb;  
Of all thy blameless life the sole return  
My verse, and Queensberry weeping o'er thy urn!  
Oh, let me live my own, and die so too!  
("To live and die is all I have to do")<sup>3</sup>  
Maintain a poet's dignity and ease,  
And see what friends, and read what books I please;  
Above a patron, though I condescend  
Sometimes to call a minister my friend.  
I was not born for courts or great affairs;  
I pay my debts, believe, and say my prayers,  
Can sleep without a poem in my head,  
Nor know if Dennis be alive or dead.

Why am I asked what next shall see the light?  
Heavens! was I born for nothing but to write?  
Has life no joys for me? or (to be grave)  
Have I no friend to serve, no soul to save?  
"I found him close with Swift"—"Indeed? no doubt"  
Cries prating Balbus,<sup>4</sup> "something will come out."  
'Tis all in vain, deny it as I will.  
"No, such a genius never can lie still,"  
And then for mine obligingly mistakes

The first lampoon Sir Will or Bubo<sup>5</sup> makes.

Poor guiltless I! and can I choose but smile,  
When every coxcomb knows me by my style?

Cursed be the verse, how well soe'er it flow,  
That tends to make one worthy man my foe,  
Give virtue scandal, innocence a fear,  
Or from the soft-eyed virgin steal a tear!  
But he who hurts a harmless neighbor's peace,  
Insults fallen worth, or beauty in distress,  
Who loves a lie, lame slander helps about,  
Who writes a libel, or who copies out:  
That fop whose pride affects a patron's name,  
Yet absent, wounds an author's honest fame;  
Who can your merit selfishly approve,  
And show the sense of it without the love;  
Who has the vanity to call you friend,  
Yet wants the honor, injured, to defend;  
Who tells whate'er you think, whate'er you say,  
And, if he lie not, must at least betray:  
Who to the dean and silver bell can swear,  
And sees at Cannons what was never there:<sup>6</sup>  
Who reads but with a lust to misapply,  
Make satire a lampoon, and fiction, lie:  
A lash like mine no honest man shall dread,  
But all such babbling blockheads in his stead.

Let Sporus<sup>7</sup> tremble—A. What? that thing of silk,  
Sporus, that mere white curd of ass's milk?<sup>8</sup>  
Satire or sense, alas! can Sporus feel?  
Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?

P. Yet let me flap this bug with gilded wings,  
This painted child of dirt, that stinks and stings;  
Whose buzz the witty and the fair annoys,  
Yet wit ne'er tastes, and beauty ne'er enjoys;  
So well-bred spaniels civilly delight  
In mumbling of the game they dare not bite.

Eternal smiles his emptiness betray,  
As shallow streams run dimpling all the way.  
Whether in florid impotence he speaks,  
And, as the prompter breathes, the puppet squeaks;  
Or at the ear of Eve,<sup>9</sup> familiar toad,  
Half froth, half venom, spits himself abroad,  
In puns, or politics, or tales, or lies,  
Or spite, or smut, or rhymes, or blasphemies.  
His wit all seesaw between *that* and *this*,  
Now high, now low, now master up, now miss,  
And he himself one vile antithesis.  
Amphibious thing! that acting either part,  
The trifling head or the corrupted heart,  
Fop at the toilet, flatterer at the board,  
Now trips a lady, and now struts a lord.  
Eve's tempter thus the rabbins<sup>1</sup> have expressed,  
A cherub's face, a reptile all the rest;  
Beauty that shocks you, parts that none will trust,  
Wit that can creep, and pride that licks the dust.

Not fortune's worshiper, nor fashion's fool,  
Not lucre's madman, nor ambition's tool,  
Not proud, nor servile, be one poet's praise,  
That if he pleased, he pleased by manly ways:  
That flattery, even to kings, he held a shame,  
And thought a lie in verse or prose the same:  
That not in fancy's maze he wandered long,  
But stooped<sup>2</sup> to truth, and moralized his song:  
That not for fame, but virtue's better end,  
He stood the furious foe, the timid friend,  
The damning critic, half approving wit,  
The coxcomb hit, or fearing to be hit;  
Laughed at the loss of friends he never had,  
The dull, the proud, the wicked, and the mad;  
The distant threats of vengeance on his head,  
The blow unfelt, the tear he never shed;

The tale revived, the lie so oft o'erthrown,  
The imputed trash, and dullness not his own;  
The morals blackened when the writings 'scape,  
The libeled person, and the pictured shape;<sup>3</sup>  
Abuse on all he loved, or loved him, spread,  
A friend in exile, or a father dead;  
The whisper, that to greatness still too near,  
Perhaps yet vibrates on his Sovereign's ear—  
Welcome for thee, fair virtue! all the past:  
For thee, fair virtue! welcome even the last!

A. But why insult the poor, affront the great?

P. A knave's a knave to me in every state:

Alike my scorn, if he succeed or fail,  
Sporus at court, or Japhet<sup>4</sup> in a jail,  
A hireling scribbler, or a hireling peer,  
Knight of the post<sup>5</sup> corrupt, or of the shire,  
If on a pillory, or near a throne,  
He gain his prince's ear, or lose his own.<sup>6</sup>

Yet soft by nature, more a dupe than wit,  
Sappho<sup>o</sup> can tell you how this man was bit:<sup>o</sup>  
This dreaded satirist Dennis will confess  
Foe to his pride, but friend to his distress:<sup>7</sup>  
So humble, he has knocked at Tibbald's door,  
Has drunk with Cibber, nay, has rhymed for Moore.  
Full ten years slandered, did he once reply?  
Three thousand suns went down on Welsted's lie.<sup>8</sup>  
To please a mistress one aspersed his life;  
He lashed him not, but let her be his wife.  
Let Budgell charge low Grub Street on his quill,  
And write whate'er he pleased, except his will;<sup>9</sup>  
Let the two Curlls of town and court,<sup>1</sup> abuse  
His father, mother, body, soul, and muse.  
Yet why? that father held it for a rule,  
It was a sin to call our neighbor fool;  
That harmless mother thought no wife a whore:

Hear this, and spare his family, James Moore!  
Unspotted names, and memorable long,  
If there be force in virtue, or in song.

Of gentle blood (part shed in honor's cause,  
While yet in Britain honor had applause)  
Each parent sprung—A. What fortune, pray?—P. Their own,  
And better got than Bestia's<sup>2</sup> from the throne.  
Born to no pride, inheriting no strife,  
Nor marrying discord in a noble wife,  
Stranger to civil and religious rage,  
The good man walked innoxious through his age.  
No courts he saw, no suits would ever try,  
Nor dared an oath,<sup>3</sup> nor hazarded a lie.  
Unlearn'd, he knew no schoolman's subtle art,  
No language but the language of the heart.  
By nature honest, by experience wise,  
Healthy by temperance, and by exercise;  
His life, though long, to sickness passed unknown,  
His death was instant, and without a groan.  
Oh, grant me thus to live, and thus to die!  
Who sprung from kings shall know less joy than I.

O friend! may each domestic bliss be thine!  
Be no unpleasing melancholy mine:  
Me, let the tender office long engage,  
To rock the cradle of reposing age,  
With lenient arts extend a mother's breath,  
Make languor smile, and smooth the bed of death,  
Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,  
And keep a while one parent from the sky!<sup>4</sup>  
On cares like these if length of days attend,  
May Heaven, to bless those days, preserve my friend,  
Preserve him social, cheerful, and serene,  
And just as rich as when he served a Queen!<sup>5</sup>

A. Whether that blessing be denied or given,  
Thus far was right—the rest belongs to Heaven.

- Note 1: Finish.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: John Serle, Pope's gardener.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sirius, associated with the period of greatest heat (and hence of madness) because it sets with the sun in late summer. August, in ancient Rome, was the season for reciting poetry.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Bethlehem Hospital for the insane, in London.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The subterranean passage under the road that separated his house at Twickenham from his garden became, in Pope's hands, a romantic grotto ornamented with shells and mirrors.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A place in Southwark where debtors were free from arrest (they could not be arrested anywhere on Sundays).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Write out legal documents.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Is there some madman who, locked up without ink or paper . . . ?[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, Twickenham, Pope's villa on the bank of the Thames; a few miles above Hampton Court.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Arthur Moore, whose son, James Moore Smythe, dabbled in literature. Moore Smythe had earned Pope's enmity by using in one of his plays some unpublished lines from Pope's "Epistle 2. To a Lady" in spite of Pope's objections.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Latin for "horn," the traditional emblem of the cuckold.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The advice of Horace in *Art of Poetry* (line 388).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, living in a garret in Drury Lane, site of one of the theaters and the haunt of the profligate.[Return to reference](#)



#### 4

- Note 5: One of the four annual periods in which the law courts are in session and with which the publishing season coincided.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Famous poets helped playwrights by contributing prologues to their plays.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A foolish poet of Rhodes, who pretended much to Greek [*Pope's note*]. He is Leonard Welsted, who translated Longinus and had attacked and slandered Pope (see line 375).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Edmund Curll, shrewd and disreputable bookseller, published pirated works, works falsely ascribed to reputable writers, scandalous biographies, and other ephemera. Pope had often attacked him and had assigned to him a low role in *The Dunciad*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, he will attack Pope in the *London Journal* or write a treatise on theology, as Welsted in fact did.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Bernard Lintot, publisher of Pope's Homer and other early works.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Midas, king of ancient Lydia, had the bad taste to prefer the flute-playing of Pan to that of Apollo, whereupon the god endowed him with ass's ears. It was his barber (not his wife or his minister) who discovered the secret and whispered it into a hole in the earth. The reference to "queen" and "minister" makes it plain that Pope is alluding to George II, Queen Caroline, and Walpole.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Poet ridiculed by Virgil and Juvenal.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Colley Cibber, the poet laureate.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Henley, known as "Orator" Henley, an independent preacher of marked eccentricity, was popular among the common people, especially for his elocution.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The "bishop" is Hugh Boulter, bishop of Armagh. He had employed as his secretary Ambrose Philips (1674–1749), whose

insipid simplicity of manner in poetry earned him the nickname of “Namby-Pamby.” Bavius, the bad poet alluded to in Virgil’s *Eclogue 3*.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A term denoting the whole society of literary, political, and journalistic hack writers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In 1726 Curll had surreptitiously acquired and published without permission some of Pope’s letters to Henry Cromwell.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: To ensure the financial success of a work, wealthy readers were often asked to “subscribe” to it before printing was undertaken. Pope’s *Homer* was published in this manner.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Horace, who mentions a cough in a few poems, was plump and short.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Alexander the Great, whose head inclined to his left shoulder, resembling Pope’s hunchback.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Ovid’s family name, Naso, suggests the Latin word *nasus* (“nose”), hence the pun.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The purpose of this list is to establish Pope as the successor of Dryden and thus to place him far above his Grub Street persecutors. George Granville, Lord Lansdowne, poet, and statesman. William Walsh, poet and critic. Sir Samuel Garth, physician and mock-epic poet. William Congreve, the playwright. Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury, Lord Sommers. John Sheffield, Duke of Buckinghamshire. Francis Atterbury, bishop of Rochester, statesman. All had been associated with Dryden in his later years and all had encouraged the young Pope.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Thomas Burnet, John Oldmixon, and Thomas Cooke: Pope identifies them in a note as “authors of secret and scandalous history.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: John, Lord Hervey, whom Pope satirizes in the character of Sporus (lines 305–33).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Charles Gildon, minor critic and scribbler, who, Pope believed, early attacked him at the instigation of Addison; hence

“venal quill.”[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: John Dennis (see *An Essay on Criticism*, p. 534, n. 7).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Lewis Theobald (1688–1744), whose minute learning in Elizabethan literature had enabled him to expose Pope’s defects as an editor of Shakespeare in 1726. Pope made him king of the Dunces in *The Dunciad* of 1728. Richard Bentley (1662–1742), the eminent classical scholar, seemed to both Pope and Swift the perfect type of the pedant: he is called “slashing” because, in his edition of *Paradise Lost* (1732), he had set in square brackets all passages that he disliked on the grounds that they had been slipped into the poem without the blind poet’s knowledge.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The weight that turns the scale; here, the “deciding factor.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Philips, Pope’s rival in pastoral poetry in 1709, when their pastorals were published in Tonson’s 6th *Miscellany*. Philips had also translated some Persian tales (see line 100 and p. 577, n. 6).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Nahum Tate, poet laureate from 1692 to 1715. His popular rewriting of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* provided a happy ending; he wrote most of Part 2 of *Absalom and Achitophel*. The line refers to the old adage that it takes nine tailors to make one man.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Turkish monarchs proverbially killed off their nearest rivals.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Addison’s tragedy *Cato* had been a sensational success in 1713. Pope had written the prologue, in which occurs the line, “While Cato gives his little senate laws.” The satirical reference here is to Addison in the role of arbiter of taste among his friends and admirers, mostly Whigs, at Button’s Coffee House. This group worked against the success of Pope’s *Homer*.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pope’s satiric pseudonym for Addison. Atticus (109–32 B.C.E.), a wealthy man of letters and a friend of Cicero, was known as wise and disinterested.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The Castalian spring on Mount Parnassus was sacred to Apollo and the Muses. "Bufo": a type of tasteless patron of the arts. (*Bufo* means "toad" in Latin.)[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Mount Parnassus had two peaks, one sacred to Apollo, one to Bacchus.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Estate. Pronounced *sate* and rhymed in next line with "eat" (*ate*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: John Gay (1685–1732), author of *The Beggar's Opera*, dear friend of Swift and Pope. His failure to obtain patronage from the court intensified Pope's hostility to the Whig administration and the queen. Gay spent the last years of his life under the protection of the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry. Pope wrote his epitaph.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A quotation from John Denham's poem "Of Prudence."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Latin for *stammering*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: George Bubb ("Bubo") Dodington, a Whig patron of letters. Sir William Yonge, Whig politician and poetaster.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pope's enemies had accused him of satirizing Cannons, the ostentatious estate of the Duke of Chandos, in his description of Timon's villa in the *Epistle to Burlington*. This Pope quite justly denied. The bell of Timon's chapel was of silver, and there preached a dean who "never mentions Hell to ears polite."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: John, Lord Hervey, effeminate courtier and confidant of Queen Caroline (see headnote, p. 574). The original Sporus was a boy, whom the emperor Nero publicly married (see Suetonius's life of Nero in *Lives of the Caesars*).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Drunk by invalids.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The queen; the allusion is to *Paradise Lost* (4.799–809).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Scholars of and authorities on Jewish law and doctrine.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The falcon is said to “stoop” to its prey when it swoops down and seizes it in flight.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pope’s deformity was frequently ridiculed and occasionally caricatured.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Japhet Crook, a notorious forger.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: One who lives by selling false evidence.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Those punished in the pillory often also had their ears cropped.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Pope wrote the prologue to Cibber’s *Provoked Husband* (1728) when that play was performed for Dennis’s benefit, shortly before the old critic died.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: This man had the impudence to tell in print that Mr. P. had occasioned a Lady’s death, and to name a person he had never heard of [*Pope’s note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Eustace Budgell attacked the *Grub Street Journal* for publishing what he took to be a squib by Pope charging him with having forged the will of Dr. Matthew Tindal.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, the publisher and Lord Hervey.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Probably the Duke of Marlborough, whose vast fortune was made through the favor of Queen Anne. The actual Bestia was a corrupt Roman consul.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As a Catholic, Pope’s father refused to take the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy and the oath against the pope. He thus rendered himself vulnerable to the many repressive anti-Catholic laws then in force.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pope was a tender and devoted son. His mother had died in 1733. The earliest version of these lines dates from 1731, when the poet was nursing her through a serious illness.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Pope alludes to the fact that Arbuthnot, a man of strict probity, left the queen’s service no wealthier than when he entered it.[Return to reference 5](#)

# Notes

- °: *missed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *medicine*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *killed*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *asks for help*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *playhouse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *shares*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *whisper*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Virgil*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *verses*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *endure*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *law students*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *in red letters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *posters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *flattered* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pen*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Montagu* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *deceived*[Return to reference](#) °

## JOHN GAY

### 1685–1732

The career of John Gay encompasses most of the ways that a talented but indigent writer of the early eighteenth century could try to make a living: publication, patronage, odd jobs at court, and the theater. After a good education at school in Devon, he went to London at seventeen to try his luck as apprentice to a dealer in silks. Five years later he became secretary to a friend from school, the writer and entrepreneur Aaron Hill, who introduced him to the publishing world and literary circles. Eventually, leading authors in London adopted Gay as a favorite; with Pope, Swift, Arbuthnot, and Thomas Parnell, he founded the Scriblerus Club, famous for its literary satires and practical jokes. Friends like these helped him obtain the patrons and political appointments that supported him. The same Scriblerian influence shaped the mixture of high Virgilian style and rustic humor in his first successful poem, *The Shepherd's Week* (1714), a burlesque pastoral. Here and in his other verse Gay shows off his special gifts: lightness of touch, a keen eye for homely details, and an irony that exposes the disparity between high poetic expectations and the coarse reality of the way people live. Two years later a mock-georgic, *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London*, revealed that the town could be as rough as the country, and far more corrupting. Gay's hopes for affluence were blasted by the collapse of South Sea stock in 1720. His popularity and financial security rose to new heights, however, with the phenomenal success

of his verse *Fables* (1727; a second set was published posthumously in 1738) and above all *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), which made him rich. But he did not enjoy his prosperity for long. A sequel, *Polly* (1729), was banned from the stage by Sir Robert Walpole; and although the printed version sold very well, the tension may have precipitated the illness that led a few years later to his death.

Audiences have always loved *The Beggar's Opera*. Nothing quite like it had ever been seen on the London stage; when Congreve read the script, he said, "It would either take greatly, or be damned confoundedly." On opening night, according to Pope, Gay's friends were anxious, "till we were very much encouraged by overhearing the Duke of Argyle, who sat in the next box to us, say, 'It will do—it must do! I see it in the eyes of them.' " The duke was right. The play quickly became the talk of the town, it ran for a record sixty-two performances, and during the rest of the century it kept being revived. At first the shock of pleasure must have been sparked by daring thrusts at people and things in the news. Italian opera is one obvious target. Although it was extravagantly artificial and costly, with lavish scenery and imported stars, opera had been the rage of fashionable London. Now Gay turned the music over to beggars, or actors playing thieves and sex workers, and gave them popular British tunes to sing instead of showy foreign arias.

On this stage, moreover, the underworld rose to the surface. Crime was a constant, brutal threat in early eighteenth-century London, and stories about notorious criminals (such as Moll Flanders) poured from the press. In the corrupt legal system, which rewarded racketeers for informing on (or "peaching") less powerful felons, the line between those who broke the law and those who enforced it was often smudged. Jonathan Wild, the "Thief-Taker General of Great Britain and Ireland," became rich and famous by manipulating this system (before the executioner caught up with him); he serves as a model for Peachum. By comparison, a forthright highwayman and killer like Macheath might seem rather gallant. But the electricity of the play comes from its superimposition of these criminals on heads of state, especially the prime minister, Robert



Walpole. Playgoers recognized Walpole everywhere. In Act 2, scene 10, for instance, when Peachum and Lockit argue and conspire —“like great statesmen, we encourage those who betray their friends”—the audience roared at the allusion to Walpole and Lord Townshend, his ally and brother-in-law (at an early performance, Walpole himself is said to have won over the crowd by calling for an encore). Spectators saw a picture of their own times on the stage: a society driven by greed, where everything, including justice and love, was for sale.

Yet *The Beggar's Opera* has lasted beyond its age. The parallel between high life and low life turned out to be more than a trick; it still rings true when audiences reflect on those who hold power today. Brecht's and Weill's famous *Threepenny Opera* adapted Gay's story to the sinister conditions of Germany in the 1920s; gang lords, fascists, and capitalistic bosses all seem the same. Little people go to jail, the high ones get away. That worldly and cynical message, seasoned with wit, continues to make sense to people who compare their ideals of government, society, and law to things as they are.

Pope's epitaph on Gay, inscribed in Westminster Abbey, begins this way:

Of manners gentle, of affections mild;  
In wit, a man; simplicity, a child;  
With native humor tempering virtuous rage,  
Formed to delight at once and lash the age.

But Gay's own epitaph is far less pious:

Life is a jest, and all things show it;  
I thought so once, but now I know it.

# The Beggar's Opera

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE<sup>1</sup>

### *Men*

PEACHUM  
ROBIN OF BAGSHOT  
LOCKIT  
NIMMING NED  
MACHEATH  
HARRY PADDINGTON  
FILCH  
MATT OF THE MINT  
JEMMY TWITCHER  
BEN BUDGE  
CROOK-FINGERED JACK  
BEGGAR  
WAT DREARY  
PLAYER

Constables, drawer, turnkey, etc.

### *Women*

MRS. PEACHUM  
MRS. VIXEN  
POLLY PEACHUM  
BETTY DOXY  
LUCY LOCKIT  
JENNY DIVER

DIANA TRAPES  
MRS. SLAMMEKIN  
MRS. COAXER  
SUKY TAWDRY  
DOLLY TRULL  
MOLLY BRAZEN

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The names of characters reflect their trades. Peachum ("peach 'em") is an informer, Lockit a jailer, Macheath a "son of the heath" or highwayman, Twitcher and Diver pickpockets, Nimming Ned a thief, Budge a burglar, Trull and Doxy sex workers. Dreary ("gory") suggests a cutthroat; Bagshot Heath was known for highway robberies; Paddington ("pad," a highwayman) was where criminals were hanged; the Mint was a sanctuary for outlaws. Johnson defined "trapes" as "An idle slatternly woman," and "slammekin" had similar associations. [Return to reference 1](#)

## ***Introduction***

BEGGAR, PLAYER

BEGGAR If poverty be a title to poetry, I am sure nobody can dispute mine. I own myself of the Company of Beggars; and I make one at their weekly festivals at St. Giles's.<sup>2</sup> I have a small yearly salary for my catches,<sup>3</sup> and am welcome to a dinner there whenever I please, which is more than most poets can say.

PLAYER As we live by the Muses, 'tis but gratitude in us to encourage poetical merit wherever we find it. The Muses, contrary to all other ladies, pay no distinction to dress, and never partially mistake the pertness of embroidery for wit, nor the modesty of want for dullness. Be the author who he will, we push his play as far as it will go. So (though you are in want) I wish you success heartily.

BEGGAR This piece I own was originally writ for the celebrating the marriage of James Chanter and Moll Lay, two most excellent ballad singers. I have introduced the similes that are in all your celebrated operas: the swallow, the moth, the bee, the ship, the flower, etc. Besides, I have a prison scene, which the ladies always reckon charmingly pathetic. As to the parts, I have observed such a nice impartiality to our two ladies, that it is impossible for either of them to take offense.<sup>4</sup> I hope I may be forgiven, that I have not made my opera throughout unnatural, like those in vogue; for I have no recitative.<sup>5</sup> Excepting this, as I have consented to have neither prologue nor epilogue, it must be allowed an opera in all its forms. The piece indeed hath been heretofore frequently represented by ourselves in our great room at St. Giles's, so that I cannot too often acknowledge your charity in bringing it now on the stage.

PLAYER But I see 'tis time for us to withdraw; the actors are preparing to begin. Play away the overture.

[*Exeunt.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 2: A slum named after the patron saint of beggars and lepers. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Rounds, in which one singer follows or chases the words of another. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Two famous divas, Faustina and Cuzzoni, had recently feuded on stage. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Operatic declamation, midway between singing and speaking. [Return to reference 5](#)

## ***Act 1***

## SCENE 1 *Peachum's house*

PEACHUM *sitting at a table with a large book of accounts before him.*

AIR 1. An old woman clothed in gray<sup>6</sup>

*Through all the employments of life  
Each neighbor abuses his brother;  
Whore and rogue they call husband and wife;  
All professions be-rogue one another.  
The priest calls the lawyer a cheat,  
The lawyer be-knaves the divine;  
And the statesman, because he's so great,  
Thinks his trade as honest as mine.*

A lawyer is an honest employment, so is mine. Like me too he acts in a double capacity, both against rogues and for 'em; for 'tis but fitting that we should protect and encourage cheats, since we live by them.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: The name of the ballad whose tune Peachum sings. [Return to reference 6](#)

## SCENE 2

### PEACHUM, FILCH

FILCH Sir, Black Moll hath sent word her trial comes on in the afternoon, and she hopes you will order matters so as to bring her off.

PEACHUM Why, she may plead her belly<sup>2</sup> at worst; to my knowledge she hath taken care of that security. But as the wench is very active and industrious, you may satisfy her that I'll soften the evidence.

FILCH Tom Gagg, sir, is found guilty.

PEACHUM A lazy dog! When I took him the time before, I told him what he would come to if he did not mend his hand. This is death without reprieve. I may venture to book him. [*Writes.*] For Tom Gagg, forty pounds.<sup>8</sup> Let Betty Sly know that I'll save her from transportation,<sup>9</sup> for I can get more by her staying in England.

FILCH Betty hath brought more goods into our lock to-year<sup>1</sup> than any five of the gang; and in truth, 'tis a pity to lose so good a customer.

PEACHUM If none of the gang take her off,<sup>2</sup> she may, in the common course of business, live a twelve-month longer. I love to let women scape. A good sportsman always lets the hen partridges fly, because the breed of the game depends upon them. Besides, here the law allows us no reward; there is nothing to be got by the death of women—except our wives.

FILCH Without dispute, she is a fine woman! 'Twas to her I was obliged for my education, and (to say a bold word) she hath trained up more young fellows to the business than the gaming-table.

PEACHUM Truly, Filch, thy observation is right. We and the surgeons are more beholden to women than all the professions besides.<sup>3</sup>

AIR 2. The bonny gray-eyed morn



FILCH     *'Tis woman that seduces all mankind,  
By her we first were taught the wheedling arts:  
Her very eyes can cheat; when most she's kind,  
She tricks us of our money with our hearts.  
For her, like wolves by night we roam for prey,  
And practise every fraud to bribe her charms;  
For suits of love, like law, are won by pay,  
And beauty must be fee'd into our arms.*

PEACHUM   But make haste to Newgate,<sup>4</sup> boy, and let my friends  
know what I intend; for I love to make them easy one way or  
other.

FILCH   When a gentleman is long kept in suspense, penitence may  
break his spirit ever after. Besides, certainty gives a man a good  
air upon his trial, and makes him risk another without fear or  
scruple. But I'll away, for 'tis a pleasure to be the messenger of  
comfort to friends in affliction.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Claim to be pregnant, hence not at risk of execution. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The reward when informing resulted in execution. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Criminals were sentenced to banishment abroad. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This year. "Lock": a house where stolen goods are kept. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Inform on her. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Surgeons treated venereal diseases. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The chief London prison. [Return to reference 4](#)

### SCENE 3

#### PEACHUM

But 'tis now high time to look about me for a decent execution against next Sessions.<sup>5</sup> I hate a lazy rogue, by whom one can get nothing 'till he is hanged. A register of the gang, [*reading*] Crook-fingered Jack. A year and a half in the service; let me see how much the stock owes to his industry: one, two, three, four, five gold watches, and seven silver ones. A mighty clean-handed fellow! Sixteen snuff-boxes, five of them of true gold. Six dozen of handkerchiefs, four silver-hilted swords, half a dozen of shirts, three tye-perriwigs, and a piece of broad cloth. Considering these are only the fruits of his leisure hours, I don't know a prettier fellow, for no man alive hath a more engaging presence of mind upon the road. Wat Dreary, alias Brown Will, an irregular dog, who hath an underhand way of disposing of his goods. I'll try him only for a Sessions or two longer upon his good behavior. Harry Paddington, a poor petty-larceny rascal, without the least genius; that fellow, though he were to live these six months, will never come to the gallows with any credit. Slippery Sam; he goes off the next Sessions, for the villain hath the impudence to have views of following his trade as a tailor, which he calls an honest employment. Matt of the Mint; listed<sup>6</sup> not above a month ago, a promising sturdy fellow, and diligent in his way; somewhat too bold and hasty, and may raise good contributions on the public, if he does not cut himself short by murder. Tom Tipple, a guzzling soaking sot, who is always too drunk to stand himself, or to make others stand.<sup>7</sup> A cart<sup>8</sup> is absolutely necessary for him. Robin of Bagshot, alias Gorgon, alias Bluff Bob, alias Carbuncle, alias Bob Booty.<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 5: Trials of criminals, held eight times a year.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Enlisted.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Stand still; that is, when held up.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Carriage to the gallows.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: This became a nickname for Walpole.[Return to reference 9](#)

## SCENE 4

### PEACHUM, MRS. PEACHUM

MRS. PEACHUM    What of Bob Booty, husband? I hope nothing bad hath betided him. You know, my dear, he's a favorite customer of mine. 'Twas he made me a present of this ring.

PEACHUM    I have set his name down in the black-list, that's all, my dear; he spends his life among women, and as soon as his money is gone, one or other of the ladies will hang him for the reward, and there's forty pound lost to us forever.

MRS. PEACHUM    You know, my dear, I never meddle in matters of death; I always leave those affairs to you. Women indeed are bitter bad judges in these cases, for they are so partial to the brave that they think every man handsome who is going to the camp or the gallows.

AIR 3.    Cold and raw

*If any wench Venus's girdle wear,  
Though she be never so ugly;  
Lilies and roses will quickly appear,  
And her face look wond'rous smugly.  
Beneath the left ear so fit but a cord,  
(A rope so charming a zone is!)  
The youth in his cart hath the air of a lord,  
And we cry, "There dies an Adonis!"<sup>1</sup>*

But really, husband, you should not be too hard hearted, for you never had a finer, braver set of men than at present. We have not had a murder among them all, these seven months. And truly, my dear, that is a great blessing.

PEACHUM    What a dickens is the woman always a-whimpering about murder for? No gentleman is ever looked upon the worse for

killing a man in his own defense; and if business cannot be carried on without it, what would you have a gentleman do?

MRS. PEACHUM If I am in the wrong, my dear, you must excuse me, for nobody can help the frailty of an over-scrupulous conscience.

PEACHUM Murder is as fashionable a crime as a man can be guilty of. How many fine gentlemen have we in Newgate every year, purely upon that article! If they have wherewithal to persuade the jury to bring it in manslaughter, what are they the worse for it? So, my dear, have done upon this subject. Was Captain Macheath here this morning, for the bank notes he left with you last week?

MRS. PEACHUM Yes, my dear; and though the bank hath stopped payment, he was so cheerful and so agreeable! Sure there is not a finer gentleman upon the road than the Captain! If he comes from Bagshot at any reasonable hour he hath promised to make one this evening with Polly and me, and Bob Booty, at a party of quadrille.<sup>2</sup> Pray, my dear, is the Captain rich?

PEACHUM The Captain keeps too good company ever to grow rich. Marybone and the chocolate-houses<sup>3</sup> are his undoing. The man that proposes to get money by play should have the education of a fine gentleman, and be trained up to it from his youth.

MRS. PEACHUM Really, I am sorry upon Polly's account the Captain hath not more discretion. What business hath he to keep company with lords and gentlemen? He should leave them to prey upon one another.

PEACHUM Upon Polly's account! What, a plague, does the woman mean? Upon Polly's account!

MRS. PEACHUM Captain Macheath is very fond of the girl.

PEACHUM And what then?

MRS. PEACHUM If I have any skill in the ways of women, I am sure Polly thinks him a very pretty man.

PEACHUM And what then? You would not be so mad to have the wench marry him! Gamesters and highwaymen are generally very good to their whores, but they are very devils to their wives.

MRS. PEACHUM But if Polly should be in love, how should we help her, or how can she help herself? Poor girl, I am in the utmost concern

about her.

AIR 4. Why is your faithful slave disdained?

*If love the virgin's heart invade,  
How, like a moth, the simple maid  
Still plays about the flame!  
If soon she be not made a wife,  
Her honor's singed, and then for life,  
She's—what I dare not name.*

PEACHUM Look ye, wife. A handsome wench in our way of business is as profitable as at the bar of a Temple<sup>4</sup> coffee-house, who looks upon it as her livelihood to grant every liberty but one. You see I would indulge the girl as far as prudently we can. In anything but marriage! After that, my dear, how shall we be safe? Are we not then in her husband's power? For a husband hath the absolute power over all a wife's secrets but her own. If the girl had the discretion of a court lady, who can have a dozen young fellows at her ear without complying with one, I should not matter it;<sup>5</sup> but Polly is tinder, and a spark will at once set her on a flame. Married! If the wench does not know her own profit, sure she knows her own pleasure better than to make herself a property!<sup>6</sup> My daughter to me should be, like a court lady to a minister of state, a key to the whole gang. Married! If the affair is not already done, I'll terrify her from it, by the example of our neighbors.

MRS. PEACHUM Mayhap, my dear, you may injure the girl. She loves to imitate the fine ladies, and she may only allow the Captain liberties in the view of interest.

PEACHUM But 'tis your duty, my dear, to warn the girl against her ruin, and to instruct her how to make the most of her beauty. I'll go to her this moment, and sift her. In the meantime, wife, rip out the coronets and marks of these dozen of cambric handkerchiefs, for I can dispose of them this afternoon to a chap in the City.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Venus's lover. The magic powers of Venus's belt ("girdle"), which could make any woman sexy, are associated with the rope or belt ("zone") around a condemned man's neck.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A card game.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Popular haunts for gambling.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: London college for lawyers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Think it important.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A husband had legal title to everything his wife possessed.[Return to reference 6](#)

## SCENE 5

MRS. PEACHUM

Never was a man more out of the way in an argument than my husband! Why must our Polly, forsooth, differ from her sex, and love only her husband? And why must Polly's marriage, contrary to all observation, make her the less followed by other men? All men are thieves in love, and like a woman the better for being another's property.

AIR 5. Of all the simple things we do

*A maid is like the golden ore,  
Which hath guineas intrinsical in't,  
Whose worth is never known, before  
It is tried and impressed in the Mint.  
A wife's like a guinea in gold,  
Stamped with the name of her spouse:  
Now here, now there, is bought, or is sold,  
And is current in every house.*



## SCENE 6

### MRS. PEACHUM, FILCH

MRS. PEACHUM Come hither, Filch. I am as fond of this child, as though my mind misgave me he were my own. He hath as fine a hand at picking a pocket as a woman, and is as nimble-fingered as a juggler. If an unlucky Session does not cut the rope of thy life, I pronounce, boy, thou wilt be a great man in history. Where was your post last night, my boy?

FILCH I plied at the opera, madam; and considering 'twas neither dark nor rainy, so that there was no great hurry in getting chairs and coaches, made a tolerable hand on't. These seven handkerchiefs, madam.

MRS. PEACHUM Colored ones, I see. They are of sure sale from our warehouse at Redriff among the seamen.

FILCH And this snuffbox.

MRS. PEACHUM Set in gold! A pretty encouragement this to a young beginner.

FILCH I had a fair tug at a charming gold watch. Pox take the tailors for making the fobs so deep and narrow! It stuck by the way, and I was forced to make my escape under a coach. Really, madam, I fear I shall be cut off in the flower of my youth, so that every now and then (since I was pumped)<sup>7</sup> I have thoughts of taking up and going to sea.

MRS. PEACHUM You should go to Hockley in the Hole,<sup>8</sup> and to Marybone, child, to learn valor. These are the schools that have bred so many brave men. I thought, boy, by this time, thou hadst lost fear as well as shame. Poor lad! How little does he know as yet of the Old Bailey!<sup>9</sup> For the first fact I'll insure thee from being hanged; and going to sea, Filch, will come time enough upon a sentence of transportation. But now, since you have nothing better to do, even go to your book, and learn your catechism, for really a man makes but an ill figure in the Ordinary's paper,<sup>1</sup> who cannot give a satisfactory answer to his questions. But, hark you,

my lad. Don't tell me a lie; for you know I hate a liar. Do you know of anything that hath passed between Captain Macheath and our Polly?

FILCH I beg you, madam, don't ask me; for I must either tell a lie to you or to Miss Polly; for I promised her I would not tell.

MRS. PEACHUM But when the honor of our family is concerned—

FILCH I shall lead a sad life with Miss Polly, if ever she come to know that I told you. Besides, I would not willingly forfeit my own honor by betraying anybody.

MRS. PEACHUM Yonder comes my husband and Polly. Come, Filch, you shall go with me into my own room, and tell me the whole story. I'll give thee a glass of a most delicious cordial that I keep for my own drinking.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: When pickpockets were caught, they were doused with water.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A place for brutal sports such as bear-baiting.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: London's criminal court.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: First offenders could escape the death sentence by pleading "benefit of clergy" if they passed a literacy test given by the ordinary or chaplain of Newgate.[Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 7

### PEACHUM, POLLY

POLLY I know as well as any of the fine ladies how to make the most of myself and of my man too. A woman knows how to be mercenary, though she hath never been in a court or at an assembly.<sup>2</sup> We have it in our natures, papa. If I allow Captain Macheath some trifling liberties, I have this watch and other visible marks of his favor to show for it. A girl who cannot grant some things, and refuse what is most material, will make but a poor hand of her beauty, and soon be thrown upon the common.<sup>3</sup>

AIR 6. What shall I do to show how much I love her

*Virgins are like the fair flower in its luster,  
Which in the garden enamels the ground;  
Near it the bees in play flutter and cluster,  
And gaudy butterflies frolic around.  
But, when once plucked, 'tis no longer alluring,  
To Covent Garden<sup>4</sup> 'tis sent (as yet sweet),  
There fades, and shrinks, and grows past all  
enduring,  
Rots, stinks, and dies, and is trod under feet.*

PEACHUM You know, Polly, I am not against your toying and trifling with a customer in the way of business, or to get out a secret, or so. But if I find out that you have played the fool and are married, you jade you, I'll cut your throat, hussy. Now you know my mind.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: A public social affair.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Common land; common law; and a name for a sex worker.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A market where produce was bought and sex workers engaged clients.[Return to reference 4](#)

## SCENE 8

PEACHUM, POLLY, MRS. PEACHUM

AIR 7. Oh London is a fine town

MRS. PEACHUM    *[In a very great passion.]*

*Our Polly is a sad slut! nor heeds what we have taught her.*

*I wonder any man alive will ever rear a daughter!*

*For she must have both hoods and gowns, and hoops to swell her pride,*

*With scarfs and stays, and gloves and lace; and she will have men beside;*

*And when she's dressed with care and cost, all-tempting, fine and gay,*

*As men should serve a cowcumber,<sup>5</sup> she flings herself away.*

*Our Polly is a sad slut, etc.*

You baggage! You hussy! You inconsiderate jade! Had you been hanged, it would not have vexed me, for that might have been your misfortune; but to do such a mad thing by choice! The wench is married, husband.

PEACHUM    Married! The Captain is a bold man, and will risk anything for money; to be sure he believes her a fortune. Do you think your mother and I should have lived comfortably so long together, if ever we had been married? Baggage!

MRS. PEACHUM    I knew she was always a proud slut; and now the wench hath played the fool and married, because forsooth she would do like the gentry. Can you support the expense of a husband, hussy, in gaming, drinking and whoring? Have you money enough to carry on the daily quarrels of man and wife about who shall squander most? There are not many husbands and wives who can bear the charges of plaguing one another in a handsome way. If you must be married, could you introduce nobody into our family but a highwayman? Why, thou foolish jade,

thou wilt be as ill-used, and as much neglected, as if thou hadst married a lord!

PEACHUM Let not your anger, my dear, break through the rules of decency, for the Captain looks upon himself in the military capacity, as a gentleman by his profession. Besides what he hath already, I know he is in a fair way of getting,<sup>6</sup> or of dying; and both these ways, let me tell you, are most excellent chances for a wife. Tell me hussy, are you ruined or no?

MRS. PEACHUM With Polly's fortune, she might very well have gone off to a person of distinction. Yes, that you might, you pouting slut!

PEACHUM What, is the wench dumb? Speak, or I'll make you plead by squeezing out an answer from you. Are you really bound wife to him, or are you only upon liking?<sup>7</sup> [*Pinches her.*]

POLLY Oh! [*Screaming.*]

MRS. PEACHUM How the mother is to be pitied who hath handsome daughters! Locks, bolts, bars, and lectures of morality are nothing to them; they break through them all. They have as much pleasure in cheating a father and mother as in cheating at cards.

PEACHUM Why, Polly, I shall soon know if you are married, by Macheath's keeping from our house.

#### AIR 8. Grim king of the ghosts

POLLY *Can love be controlled by advice?  
Will Cupid our mothers obey?  
Though my heart were as frozen as ice,  
At his flame 'twould have melted away.  
When he kissed me so closely he pressed,  
'Twas so sweet that I must have complied;  
So I thought it both safest and best  
To marry, for fear you should chide.*

MRS. PEACHUM Then all the hopes of our family are gone for ever and ever!

PEACHUM And Macheath may hang his father and mother-in-law, in hope to get into their daughter's fortune.

POLLY I did not marry him (as 'tis the fashion) coolly and deliberately for honor or money. But I love him.

MRS. PEACHUM Love him! Worse and worse! I thought the girl had been better bred. O husband, husband! Her folly makes me mad! My head swims! I'm distracted! I can't support myself—O!  
[*Faints.*]

PEACHUM See, wench, to what a condition you have reduced your poor mother! A glass of cordial, this instant. How the poor woman takes it to heart! [POLLY *goes out, and returns with it.*] Ah hussy, now this is the only comfort your mother has left!

POLLY Give her another glass, sir; my mama drinks double the quantity whenever she is out of order. This, you see, fetches<sup>8</sup> her.

MRS. PEACHUM The girl shows such a readiness, and so much concern, that I could almost find in my heart to forgive her.

AIR 9. O Jenny, O Jenny, where hast thou been

MRS. PEACHUM *Oh Polly, you might have toyed and kissed.  
By keeping men off, you keep them on.*

POLLY *But he so teased me,  
And he so pleased me,  
What I did, you must have done.*

MRS. PEACHUM Not with a highwayman. You sorry slut!

PEACHUM A word with you, wife. 'Tis no new thing for a wench to take man without consent of parents. You know 'tis the frailty of woman, my dear.

MRS. PEACHUM Yes, indeed, the sex is frail. But the first time a woman is frail, she should be somewhat nice<sup>9</sup> methinks, for then or never is the time to make her fortune. After that, she hath nothing to do but to guard herself from being found out, and she may do what she pleases.

PEACHUM    Make yourself a little easy; I have a thought shall soon set all matters again to rights. Why so melancholy, Polly? Since what is done cannot be undone, we must all endeavor to make the best of it.

MRS. PEACHUM    Well, Polly, as far as one woman can forgive another, I forgive thee. Your father is too fond of you, hussy.

POLLY    Then all my sorrows are at an end.

MRS. PEACHUM    A mighty likely speech in troth, for a wench who is just married!

AIR 10.        Thomas, I cannot

POLLY    *I, like a ship in storms, was tossed,  
Yet afraid to put in to land;  
For seized in the port the vessel's lost,  
Whose treasure is contraband.  
The waves are laid,  
My duty's paid.  
O joy beyond expression!  
Thus, safe ashore,  
I ask no more,  
My all is in my possession.*

PEACHUM    I hear customers in t'other room. Go, talk with 'em, Polly; but come to us again as soon as they are gone. But, hark ye, child, if 'tis the gentleman who was here yesterday about the repeating-watch,<sup>1</sup> say, you believe we can't get intelligence of it, till tomorrow, for I lent it to Suky Straddle, to make a figure with it tonight at a tavern in Drury Lane. If t'other gentleman calls for the silver-hilted sword, you know beetle-browed Jemmy hath it on, and he doth not come from Tunbridge till Tuesday night, so that it cannot be had till then.

## Endnotes



- Note 5: Cucumber.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Acquiring wealth.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: On approval.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Revives.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Choosy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A watch that strikes the hour and quarter hour when a button is pressed.[Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 9

### PEACHUM, MRS. PEACHUM

PEACHUM Dear wife, be a little pacified. Don't let your passion run away with your senses. Polly, I grant you, hath done a rash thing.

MRS. PEACHUM If she had had only an intrigue with the fellow, why the very best families have excused and huddled up a frailty of that sort. 'Tis marriage, husband, that makes it a blemish.

PEACHUM But money, wife, is the true fuller's earth<sup>2</sup> for reputations, there is not a spot or a stain but what it can take out. A rich rogue nowadays is fit company for any gentleman; and the world, my dear, hath not such a contempt for roguery as you imagine. I tell you, wife, I can make this match turn to our advantage.

MRS. PEACHUM I am very sensible,<sup>3</sup> husband, that Captain Macheath is worth money, but I am in doubt whether he hath not two or three wives already, and then if he should die in a Session or two, Polly's dower would come into dispute.

PEACHUM That, indeed, is a point which ought to be considered.

AIR 11. A soldier and a sailor

*A fox may steal your hens, sir,  
A whore your health and pence, sir,  
Your daughter rob your chest, sir,  
Your wife may steal your rest, sir,  
A thief your goods and plate.  
But this is all but picking,  
With rest, pence, chest, and chicken;  
It ever was decreed, sir,  
If lawyer's hand is fee'd, sir,  
He steals your whole estate.*

The lawyers are bitter enemies to those in our way. They don't care that anybody should get a clandestine livelihood but themselves.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Clay used for cleaning fabrics.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Aware.[Return to reference 3](#)

## SCENE 10

### MRS. PEACHUM, PEACHUM, POLLY

POLLY 'Twas only Nimming Ned. He brought in a damask window curtain, a hoop-petticoat, a pair of silver candlesticks, a perriwig, and one silk stocking, from the fire that happened last night.

PEACHUM There is not a fellow that is cleverer in his way, and saves more goods out of the fire than Ned. But now, Polly, to your affair; for matters must not be left as they are. You are married then, it seems?

POLLY Yes, sir.

PEACHUM And how do you propose to live, child?

POLLY Like other women, sir, upon the industry of my husband.

MRS. PEACHUM What, is the wench turned fool? A highwayman's wife, like a soldier's, hath as little of his pay as of his company.

PEACHUM And had not you the common views of a gentlewoman in your marriage, Polly?

POLLY I don't know what you mean, sir.

PEACHUM Of a jointure,<sup>4</sup> and of being a widow.

POLLY But I love him, sir. How then could I have thoughts of parting with him?

PEACHUM Parting with him! Why, that is the whole scheme and intention of all marriage articles. The comfortable estate of widowhood is the only hope that keeps up a wife's spirits. Where is the woman who would scruple to be a wife, if she had it in her power to be a widow whenever she pleased? If you have any views of this sort, Polly, I shall think the match not so very unreasonable.

POLLY How I dread to hear your advice! Yet I must beg you to explain yourself.

PEACHUM Secure what he hath got, have him peached the next Sessions, and then at once you are made a rich widow.

POLLY What, murder the man I love! The blood runs cold at my heart with the very thought of it.

PEACHUM Fie, Polly! What hath murder to do in the affair? Since the thing sooner or later must happen, I dare say, the Captain himself would like that we should get the reward for his death sooner than a stranger. Why, Polly, the Captain knows that as 'tis his employment to rob, so 'tis ours to take robbers; every man in his business. So that there is no malice in the case.

MRS. PEACHUM Ay, husband, now you have nicked the matter.<sup>5</sup> To have him peached is the only thing could ever make me forgive her.

AIR 12. Now Ponder well, ye parents dear

POLLY *O, ponder well! be not severe;  
So save a wretched wife!  
For on the rope that hangs my dear  
Depends poor Polly's life.*

MRS. PEACHUM But your duty to your parents, hussy, obliges you to hang him. What would many a wife give for such an opportunity!

POLLY What is a jointure, what is widowhood to me? I know my heart. I cannot survive him.

AIR 13. Le printemps rappelle aux armes<sup>6</sup>

*The turtle<sup>7</sup> thus with plaintive crying,  
Her lover dying,  
The turtle thus with plaintive crying,  
Laments her dove.  
Down she drops quite spent with sighing,  
Paired in death, as paired in love.*

Thus, sir, it will happen to your poor Polly.

MRS. PEACHUM What, is the fool in love in earnest then? I hate thee for being particular.<sup>8</sup> Why, wench, thou art a shame to thy very

sex.

POLLY But hear me, mother. If you ever loved—

MRS. PEACHUM Those cursed playbooks she reads have been her ruin. One word more, hussy, and I shall knock your brains out, if you have any.

PEACHUM Keep out of the way, Polly, for fear of mischief, and consider of what is proposed to you.

MRS. PEACHUM Away, hussy. Hang your husband, and be dutiful.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Property jointly held by a couple, hence inherited by the wife if her husband died.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Hit the mark.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The spring calls to arms (French).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Turtledove.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Attached to one person; freakish.[Return to reference 8](#)

## SCENE 11

MRS. PEACHUM, PEACHUM [POLLY *listening*].

MRS. PEACHUM    The thing, husband, must and shall be done. For the sake of intelligence<sup>9</sup> we must take other measures, and have him peached the next Session without her consent. If she will not know her duty, we know ours.

PEACHUM    But really, my dear, it grieves one's heart to take off a great man. When I consider his personal bravery, his fine stratagem,<sup>1</sup> how much we have already got by him, and how much more we may get, methinks I can't find in my heart to have a hand in his death. I wish you could have made Polly undertake it.

MRS. PEACHUM    But in a case of necessity—our own lives are in danger.

PEACHUM    Then, indeed, we must comply with the customs of the world, and make gratitude give way to interest. He shall be taken off.

MRS. PEACHUM    I'll undertake to manage Polly.

PEACHUM    And I'll prepare matters for the Old Bailey.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Secret information.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Guile.[Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 12

### POLLY

Now I'm a wretch, indeed. Methinks I see him already in the cart, sweeter and more lovely than the nosegay in his hand! I hear the crowd extolling his resolution and intrepidity! What volleys of sighs are sent from the windows of Holborn,<sup>2</sup> that so comely a youth should be brought to disgrace! I see him at the tree! The whole circle are in tears! Even butchers weep! Jack Ketch<sup>3</sup> himself hesitates to perform his duty, and would be glad to lose his fee, by a reprieve. What then will become of Polly! As yet I may inform him of their design, and aid him in his escape. It shall be so. But then he flies, absents himself, and I bar my self from his dear dear conversation!<sup>4</sup> That too will distract me. If he keep out of the way, my papa and mama may in time relent, and we may be happy. If he stays, he is hanged, and then he is lost forever! He intended to lie concealed in my room, 'till the dusk of the evening. If they are abroad, I'll this instant let him out, lest some accident should prevent him.

*[Exit, and returns.]*

## Endnotes

- Note 2: The street that connects Newgate to the gallows ("tree") at Tyburn.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The hangman (after a famous 17th-century executioner).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Intimate contact.[Return to reference 4](#)



## SCENE 13

### POLLY, MACHEATH

AIR 14. Pretty parrot, say

MACHEATH      *Pretty Polly, say,  
                         When I was away,  
Did your fancy never stray  
                         To some newer lover?*

POLLY           *Without disguise,  
                         Heaving sighs,  
                         Doating eyes,  
My constant heart discover.  
                         Fondly let me loll!*

MACHEATH      *O pretty, pretty Poll.*

POLLY      And are *you* as fond as ever, my dear?

MACHEATH      Suspect my honor, my courage, suspect anything but my  
                         love. May my pistols misfire, and my mare slip her shoulder while I  
                         am pursued, if I ever forsake thee!

POLLY      Nay, my dear, I have no reason to doubt you, for I find in the  
                         romance you lent me, none of the great heroes were ever false in  
                         love.

AIR 15. Pray, fair one, be kind

MACHEATH      *My heart was so free,  
                         It roved like the bee,  
'Till Polly my passion requited;  
                         I sipped each flower,  
                         I changed every hour,  
But here every flower is united.*

POLLY Were you sentenced to transportation, sure, my dear, you could not leave me behind you—could you?

MACHEATH Is there any power, any force that could tear me from thee? You might sooner tear a pension out of the hands of a courtier, a fee from a lawyer, a pretty woman from a looking glass, or any woman from quadrille. But to tear me from thee is impossible!

AIR 16. Over the hills and far away

MACHEATH *Were I laid on Greenland's coast,  
And in my arms embraced my lass;  
Warm amidst eternal frost,  
Too soon the half year's night would pass.*

POLLY *Were I sold on Indian soil,  
Soon as the burning day was closed,  
I could mock the sultry toil,  
When on my charmer's breast reposed.*

MACHEATH *And I would love you all the day,*

POLLY *Every night would kiss and play,*

MACHEATH *If with me you'd fondly stray*

POLLY *Over the hills and far away.*

Yes, I would go with thee. But oh! How shall I speak it? I must be torn from thee. We must part.

MACHEATH How? Part?

POLLY We must, we must. My papa and mama are set against thy life. They now, even now, are in search after thee. They are preparing evidence against thee. Thy life depends upon a moment.

AIR 17. Gin thou wert mine awn thing

*Oh what pain it is to part!  
Can I leave thee, can I leave thee?  
Oh what pain it is to part!  
Can thy Polly ever leave thee?  
But lest death my love should thwart,  
And bring thee to the fatal cart,  
Thus I tear thee from my bleeding heart!  
Fly hence, and let me leave thee.*

One kiss and then—one kiss—begone—farewell.

MACHEATH My hand, my heart, my dear, is so riveted to thine, that I cannot unloose my hold.

POLLY But my papa may intercept thee, and then I should lose the very glimmering of hope. A few weeks, perhaps, may reconcile us all. Shall thy Polly hear from thee?

MACHEATH Must I then go?

POLLY And will not absence change your love?

MACHEATH If you doubt it, let me stay—and be hanged.

POLLY Oh how I fear! How I tremble! Go—but when safety will give you leave, you will be sure to see me again; for 'till then Polly is wretched.

AIR 18. Oh the broom

*[Parting, and looking back at each other with fondness; he at one door, she at the other.]*

MACHEATH *The miser thus a shilling sees,  
Which he's obliged to pay,  
With sighs resigns it by degrees,  
And fears 'tis gone for aye.*

POLLY *The boy, thus, when his sparrow's flown,  
The bird in silence eyes;  
But soon as out of sight 'tis gone,  
Whines, whimpers, sobs, and cries.*

## ***Act 2***

## SCENE 1 *A tavern near Newgate*

JEMMY TWITCHER, CROOK-FINGERED JACK, WAT DREARY, ROBIN OF BAGSHOT, NIMMING NED, HENRY PADDINGTON, MATT OF THE MINT, BEN BUDGE, *and the rest of the gang, at the table, with wine, brandy, and tobacco.*

BEN But prithee, Matt, what is become of thy brother Tom? I have not seen him since my return from transportation.

MATT Poor brother Tom had an accident this time twelve-month, and so clever a made fellow he was, that I could not save him from those flaying rascals the surgeons; and now, poor man, he is among the otamies<sup>5</sup> at Surgeon's Hall.

BEN So it seems, his time was come.

JEMMY But the present time is ours, and nobody alive hath more. Why are the laws levelled at us? Are we more dishonest than the rest of mankind? What we win, gentlemen, is our own by the law of arms and the right of conquest.

JACK Where shall we find such another set of practical philosophers, who to a man are above the fear of death?

WAT Sound men, and true!

ROBIN Of tried courage, and indefatigable industry!

NED Who is there here that would not die for his friend?

HARRY Who is there here that would betray him for his interest?

MATT Show me a gang of courtiers that can say as much.

BEN We are for a just partition of the world, for every man hath a right to enjoy life.

MATT We retrench the superfluities of mankind. The world is avaricious, and I hate avarice. A covetous fellow, like a jackdaw, steals what he was never made to enjoy, for the sake of hiding it. These are the robbers of mankind, for money was made for the free-hearted and generous, and where is the injury of taking from another what he hath not the heart to make use of?

JEMMY Our several stations<sup>6</sup> for the day are fixed. Good luck attend us all. Fill the glasses.

AIR 19. Fill every glass

MATT        *Fill every glass, for wine inspires us,  
                 And fires us  
                 With courage, love, and joy.  
                 Women and wine should life employ.  
                 Is there ought else on earth desirous?*

CHORUS      *Fill every glass, etc.*

## Endnotes

- Note 5: Skeletons (“anatomies”). “Had an accident”: was hanged. “Clever a made”: well-made (a). [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Individual posts. [Return to reference 6](#)

## SCENE 2

***To them enter MACHEATH.***

MACHEATH    Gentlemen, well met. My heart hath been with you this hour; but an unexpected affair hath detained me. No ceremony, I beg you.

MATT    We were just breaking up to go upon duty. Am I to have the honor of taking the air with you, sir, this evening upon the heath? I drink a dram now and then with the stagecoachmen in the way of friendship and intelligence; and I know that about this time there will be passengers upon the Western Road, who are worth speaking with.

MACHEATH    I was to have been of that party, but—

MATT    But what, sir?

MACHEATH    Is there any man who suspects my courage?

MATT    We have all been witnesses of it.

MACHEATH    My honor and truth to the gang?

MATT    I'll be answerable for it.

MACHEATH    In the division of our booty, have I ever shown the least marks of avarice or injustice?

MATT    By these questions something seems to have ruffled you. Are any of us suspected?

MACHEATH    I have a fixed confidence, gentlemen, in you all, as men of honor, and as such I value and respect you. Peachum is a man that is useful to us.

MATT    Is he about to play us any foul play? I'll shoot him through the head.

MACHEATH    I beg you, gentlemen, act with conduct and discretion. A pistol is your last resort.

MATT    He knows nothing of this meeting.

MACHEATH    Business cannot go on without him. He is a man who knows the world, and is a necessary agent to us. We have had a slight difference, and till it is accommodated I shall be obliged to keep out of his way. Any private dispute of mine shall be of no ill

consequence to my friends. You must continue to act under his direction, for the moment we break loose from him, our gang is ruined.

MATT As a bawd to a whore, I grant you, he is to us of great convenience.

MACHEATH Make him believe I have quitted the gang, which I can never do but with life. At our private quarters I will continue to meet you. A week or so will probably reconcile us.

MATT Your instructions shall be observed. 'Tis now high time for us to repair to our several duties; so till the evening at our quarters in Moorfields<sup>7</sup> we bid you farewell.

MACHEATH I shall wish myself with you. Success attend you. [*Sits down melancholy at the table.*]

AIR 20. March in *Rinaldo*,<sup>8</sup> with drums and trumpets

MATT *Let us take the road.  
Hark I hear the sound of coaches!  
The hour of attack approaches,  
To your arms, brave boys, and load.  
See the ball I hold!  
Let the chemists<sup>9</sup> toil like asses,  
Our fire their fire surpasses,  
And turns all our lead to gold.*

[*The gang, ranged in the front of the stage, load their pistols, and stick them under their girdles; then go off singing the first part in chorus.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 7: A district known as a "seminary of vice." [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Opera by Handel. [Return to reference 8](#)



- Note 9: Alchemists.[Return to reference 9](#)

### SCENE 3

#### MACHEATH

What a fool is a fond wench! Polly is most confoundedly bit.<sup>1</sup> I love the sex. And a man who loves money might as well be contented with one guinea, as I with one woman. The town perhaps hath been as much obliged to me for recruiting it with free-hearted ladies, as to any recruiting officer in the army. If it were not for us and the other gentlemen of the sword, Drury Lane<sup>2</sup> would be uninhabited.

AIR 21. Would you have a young virgin

*If the heart of a man is depressed with cares,  
The mist is dispelled when a woman appears;  
Like the notes of a fiddle, she sweetly, sweetly  
Raises the spirits, and charms our ears,  
Roses and lilies her cheeks disclose,  
But her ripe lips are more sweet than those.  
Press her,  
Caress her,  
With blisses,  
Her kisses  
Dissolve us in pleasure, and soft repose.*

I must have women. There is nothing unbends the mind like them. Money is not so strong a cordial for the time. Drawer! [*Enter DRAWER.*] Is the porter gone for all the ladies, according to my directions?

DRAWER I expect him back every minute. But you know, sir, you sent him as far as Hockley in the Hole, for three of the ladies, for one in Vinegar Yard, and for the rest of them somewhere about Lewkner's Lane. Sure some of them are below, for I hear the bar bell. As they come I will show them up. Coming, coming.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Taken in. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Associated with sex workers. [Return to reference 2](#)

## SCENE 4

**MACHEATH, MRS. COAXER, DOLLY TRULL, MRS. VIXEN, BETTY DOXY, JENNY DIVER, MRS. SLAMMEKIN, SUKY TAWDRY, *and* MOLLY BRAZEN**

MACHEATH    Dear Mrs. Coaxer, you are welcome. You look charmingly today. I hope you don't want the repairs of quality, and lay on paint.<sup>3</sup> Dolly Trull! Kiss me, you slut; are you as amorous as ever, hussy? You are always so taken up with stealing hearts, that you don't allow yourself time to steal anything else. Ah Dolly, thou wilt ever be a coquette! Mrs. Vixen, I'm yours, I always loved a woman of wit and spirit; they make charming mistresses, but plaguey wives. Betty Doxy! Come hither, hussy. Do you drink as hard as ever? You had better stick to good wholesome beer; for in troth, Betty, strong waters<sup>4</sup> will in time ruin your constitution. You should leave those to your betters. What! and my pretty Jenny Diver too! As prim and demure as ever! There is not any prude, though ever so high bred, hath a more sanctified look, with a more mischievous heart. Ah! Thou art a dear artful hypocrite. Mrs. Slammekin! As careless and genteel as ever! All you fine ladies, who know your own beauty, affect an undress.<sup>5</sup> But see, here's Suky Tawdry come to contradict what I was saying. Everything she gets one way she lays out upon her back. Why, Suky, you must keep at least a dozen tallymen.<sup>6</sup> Molly Brazen! [*She kisses him.*] That's well done. I love a free-hearted wench. Thou hast a most agreeable assurance, girl, and art as willing as a turtle. But hark! I hear music. The harper is at the door. "If music be the food of love, play on."<sup>7</sup> E'er you seat yourselves, ladies, what think you of a dance? Come in. [*Enter HARPER.*] Play the French tune that Mrs. Slammekin was so fond of.

*[A dance a la ronde in the French manner; near the end of it this song and chorus.]*

MACHEATH    *Youth's the season made for joys,  
Love is then our duty,  
She alone who that employs,  
Well deserves her beauty.  
Let's be gay,  
While we may,  
Beauty's a flower despised in decay.*

CHORUS       *Youth's the season etc.*

MACHEATH    *Let us drink and sport today,  
Ours is not tomorrow.  
Love with youth flies swift away,  
Age is nought but sorrow.  
Dance and sing,  
Time's on the wing,  
Life never knows the return of spring.*

CHORUS       *Let us drink etc.*

MACHEATH    Now, pray ladies, take your places. Here, fellow. [*Pays the HARPER.*] Bid the drawer bring us more wine. [*Exit HARPER.*] If any of the ladies choose gin, I hope they will be so free to call for it.

JENNY        You look as if you meant me. Wine is strong enough for me. Indeed, sir, I never drink strong waters, but when I have the colic.

MACHEATH    Just the excuse of the fine ladies! Why, a lady of quality is never without the colic. I hope, Mrs. Coaxer, you have had good success of late in your visits among the mercers.<sup>8</sup>

MRS. COAXER   We have so many interlopers.<sup>9</sup> Yet with industry, one may still have a little picking. I carried a silver flowered lute string and a piece of black padesoy<sup>1</sup> to Mr. Peachum's lock but last week.

MRS. VIXEN    There's Molly Brazen hath the ogle of a rattlesnake. She riveted a linen draper's eye so fast upon her that he was nicked of three pieces of cambric before he could look off.

MOLLY BRAZEN   Oh dear madam! But sure nothing can come up to your handling of laces! And then you have such a sweet deluding

tongue. To cheat a man is nothing; but the woman must have fine parts indeed who cheats a woman!

MRS. VIXEN    Lace, madam, lies in a small compass, and is of easy conveyance. But you are apt, madam, to think too well of your friends.

MRS. COAXER    If any woman hath more art than another, to be sure, 'tis Jenny Diver. Though her fellow be never so agreeable, she can pick his pocket as coolly, as if money were her only pleasure. Now that is a command of the passions uncommon in a woman!

JENNY    I never go to the tavern with a man, but in the view of business. I have other hours, and other sort of men, for my pleasure. But had I your address,<sup>2</sup> madam—

MACHEATH    Have done with your compliments, ladies; and drink about. You are not so fond of me, Jenny, as you use to be.

JENNY    'Tis not convenient, sir, to show my fondness among so many rivals. 'Tis your own choice, and not the warmth of my inclination, that will determine you.

AIR 23.    All in a misty morning

*Before the barn door crowing,  
The cock by hens attended,  
His eyes around him throwing,  
Stands for a while suspended.  
Then one he singles from the crew,  
And cheers the happy hen;  
With how do you do, and how do you do,  
And how do you do again.*

MACHEATH    Ah Jenny! Thou art a dear slut.

DOLLY    Pray, madam, were you ever in keeping?<sup>3</sup>

SUKY    I hope, madam, I ha'nt been so long upon the town, but I have met with some good fortune as well as my neighbors.

DOLLY    Pardon me, madam, I meant no harm by the question; 'twas only in the way of conversation.

SUKY     Indeed, madam, if I had not been a fool, I might have lived very handsomely with my last friend. But upon his missing five guineas, he turned me off. Now I never suspected he had counted them.

MRS. SLAMMEKIN     Who do you look upon, madam, as your best sort of keepers?

DOLLY     That, madam, is thereafter as they be.<sup>4</sup>

MRS. SLAMMEKIN     I, madam, was once kept by a Jew; and bating<sup>5</sup> their religion, to women they are a good sort of people.

SUKY     Now for my part, I own I like an old fellow, for we always make them pay for what they can't do.

MRS. VIXEN     A spruce prentice, let me tell you, ladies, is no ill thing, they bleed<sup>6</sup> freely. I have sent at least two or three dozen of them in my time to the plantations.<sup>7</sup>

JENNY     But to be sure, sir, with so much good fortune as you have had upon the road, you must be grown immensely rich.

MACHEATH     The road, indeed, hath done me justice, but the gaming table hath been my ruin.

AIR 24.     When once I lay with another man's wife

JENNY     *The gamesters and lawyers are jugglers<sup>8</sup> alike,  
If they meddle your all is in danger.  
Like gypsies, if once they can finger a souse,<sup>9</sup>  
Your pockets they pick, and they pilfer your house,  
And give your estate to a stranger.*

A man of courage should never put anything to the risk but his life. These are the tools of a man of honor. Cards and dice are only fit for cowardly cheats, who prey upon their friends. [*She takes up his pistol. SUKY takes up the other.*]

SUKY     This, sir, is fitter for your hand. Besides your loss of money, 'tis a loss to the ladies. Gaming takes you off from women. How fond could I be of you! But before company, 'tis ill bred.

MACHEATH    Wanton hussies!

JENNY    I must and will have a kiss to give my wine a zest.

*[They take him about the neck, and make signs to PEACHUM and the constables, who rush in upon him.]*

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Cosmetics. "Quality": women of high social position.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Spirits.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Prefer casual clothes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Suppliers of clothes on credit.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The opening line of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dealers in fabrics.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, competitors in thievery.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Expensive silk.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Adroitness.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A kept mistress.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Depends on their behavior.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Except for.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Spend.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The colonies, where convicts were transported.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Tricksters.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A negligible coin.[Return to reference 9](#)



## SCENE 5

### ***To them, PEACHUM and constables.***

PEACHUM I seize you, sir, as my prisoner.

MACHEATH Was this well done, Jenny? Women are decoy ducks; who can trust them! Beasts, jades, jilts, harpies, furies, whores!

PEACHUM Your case, Mr. Macheath, is not particular. The greatest heroes have been ruined by women. But, to do them justice, I must own they are a pretty sort of creatures, if we could trust them. You must now, sir, take your leave of the ladies, and if they have a mind to make you a visit, they will be sure to find you at home. The gentleman, ladies, lodges in Newgate. Constables, wait upon the Captain to his lodgings.

AIR 25. When first I laid siege to my Chloris

MACHEATH *At the tree I shall suffer with pleasure,  
At the tree I shall suffer with pleasure,  
Let me go where I will,  
In all kinds of ill,  
I shall find no such Furies as these are.*

PEACHUM Ladies, I'll take care the reckoning shall be discharged.  
[Exit MACHEATH, guarded, with PEACHUM and the constables.]

## SCENE 6

### *The women remain.*

MRS. VIXEN    Look ye, Mrs. Jenny, though Mr. Peachum may have made a private bargain with you and Suky Tawdry for betraying the Captain, as we were all assisting, we ought all to share alike.

MRS. COAXER    I think Mr. Peachum, after so long an acquaintance, might have trusted me as well as Jenny Diver.

MRS. SLAMMEKIN    I am sure at least three men of his hanging, and in a year's time too (if he did me justice), should be set down to my account.

DOLLY    Mrs. Slammekin, that is not fair. For you know one of them was taken in bed with me.

JENNY    As far as a bowl of punch or a treat, I believe Mrs. Suky will join with me. As for anything else, ladies, you cannot in conscience expect it.

MRS. SLAMMEKIN    Dear madam—

DOLLY    I would not for the world<sup>1</sup>—

MRS. SLAMMEKIN    'Tis impossible for me—

DOLLY    As I hope to be saved, madam—

MRS. SLAMMEKIN    Nay, then I must stay here all night—

DOLLY    Since you command me.

*[Exeunt with great ceremony.]*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: With exaggerated politeness, each gestures for the other to leave the room first. [Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 7 *Newgate*

LOCKIT, *turnkeys*, MACHEATH, *constables*

LOCKIT    Noble Captain, you are welcome. You have not been a lodger of mine this year and half. You know the custom, sir.

Garnish,<sup>2</sup> Captain, garnish. Hand me down those fetters there.

MACHEATH    Those, Mr. Lockit, seem to be the heaviest of the whole set. With your leave, I should like the further pair better.

LOCKIT    Look ye, Captain, we know what is fittest for our prisoners.

When a gentleman uses me with civility, I always do the best I can to please him. Hand them down I say. We have them of all prices, from one guinea to ten, and 'tis fitting every gentleman should please himself.

MACHEATH    I understand you, sir. [*Gives money.*] The fees here are so many, and so exorbitant, that few fortunes can bear the expense of getting off handsomely, or of dying like a gentleman.

LOCKIT    Those, I see, will fit the Captain better. Take down the further pair. Do but examine them, sir. Never was better work. How genteelly they are made! They will sit as easy as a glove, and the nicest man in England might not be ashamed to wear them. [*He puts on the chains.*] If I had the best gentleman in the land in my custody, I could not equip him more handsomely. And so, sir, I now leave you to your private meditations.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Jailer's fee or bribe. [Return to reference 2](#)

## SCENE 8

### MACHEATH

AIR 26. Courtiers, courtiers think it no harm

*Man may escape from rope and gun;  
Nay, some have outlived the doctor's pill;  
Who takes a woman must he undone,  
That basilisk<sup>3</sup> is sure to kill.  
The fly that sips treacle is lost in the sweets,  
So he that tastes woman, woman, woman,  
He that tastes woman, ruin meets.*

To what a woeful plight have I brought myself! Here must I (all day long, 'till I am hanged) be confined to hear the reproaches of a wench who lays her ruin at my door. I am in the custody of her father, and to be sure if he knows of the matter, I shall have a fine time on't betwixt this and my execution. But I promised the wench marriage. What signifies a promise to a woman? Does not man in marriage itself promise a hundred things that he never means to perform? Do all we can, women will believe us, for they look upon a promise as an excuse for following their own inclinations. But here comes Lucy, and I cannot get from her. Would I were deaf!

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Mythical reptile whose breath and look were fatal. [Return to reference 3](#)

## SCENE 9

### MACHEATH, LUCY

LUCY    You base man you! How can you look me in the face after what hath passed between us? See here, perfidious wretch, how I am forced to bear about the load of infamy<sup>4</sup> you have laid upon me. O Macheath! Thou hast robbed me of my quiet. To see thee tortured would give me pleasure!

AIR 27.    A lovely lass to a friar came

*Thus when a good huswife sees a rat  
In her trap in the morning taken,  
With pleasure her heart goes pit a pat,  
In revenge for her loss of bacon.  
Then she throws him  
To the dog or cat,  
To be worried, crushed and shaken.*

MACHEATH    Have you no bowels,<sup>5</sup> no tenderness, my dear Lucy, to see a husband in these circumstances?

LUCY    A husband!

MACHEATH    In every respect but the form, and that, my dear, may be said over us at any time. Friends should not insist upon ceremonies. From a man of honor, his word is as good as his bond.

LUCY    'Tis the pleasure of all you fine men to insult the women you have ruined.

AIR 28.    'Twas when the sea was roaring

*How cruel are the traitors,*

*Who lie and swear in jest,  
To cheat unguarded creatures  
Of virtue, fame, and rest!  
Whoever steals a shilling,  
Through shame the guilt conceals;  
In love the perjured villain  
With boasts the theft reveals.*

MACHEATH    The very first opportunity, my dear (have but patience),  
you shall be my wife in whatever manner you please.

LUCY    Insinuating monster! And so you think I know nothing of the  
affair of Miss Polly Peachum. I could tear thy eyes out!

MACHEATH    Sure Lucy, you can't be such a fool as to be jealous of  
Polly!

LUCY    Are you not married to her, you brute, you?

MACHEATH    Married! Very good. The wench gives it out only to vex  
thee, and to ruin me in thy good opinion. 'Tis true, I go to the  
house; I chat with the girl, I kiss her, I say a thousand things to  
her (as all gentlemen do) that mean nothing, to divert myself; and  
now the silly jade hath set it about that I am married to her, to let  
me know what she would be at. Indeed, my dear Lucy, these  
violent passions may be of ill consequence to a woman in your  
condition.

LUCY    Come, come, Captain, for all your assurance, you know that  
Miss Polly hath put it out of your power to do me the justice you  
promised me.

MACHEATH    A jealous woman believes everything her passion  
suggests. To convince you of my sincerity, if we can find the  
Ordinary,<sup>6</sup> I shall have no scruples of making you my wife; and I  
know the consequence of having two at a time.

LUCY    That you are only to be hanged, and so get rid of them both.

MACHEATH    I am ready, my dear Lucy, to give you satisfaction—if you  
think there is any in marriage. What can a man of honor say  
more?

LUCY    So then it seems you are not married to Miss Polly.

MACHEATH    You know, Lucy, the girl is prodigiously conceited. No man can say a civil thing to her, but (like other fine ladies) her vanity makes her think he's her own for ever and ever.

AIR 29.    The sun had loosed his weary teams

*The first time at the looking-glass  
The mother sets her daughter,  
The image strikes the smiling lass  
With self-love ever after.  
Each time she looks, she, fonder grown,  
Thinks every charm grows stronger.  
But alas, vain maid, all eyes but your own  
Can see you are not younger.*

When women consider their own beauties, they are all alike unreasonable in their demands; for they expect their lovers should like them as long as they like themselves.

LUCY    Yonder is my father. Perhaps this way we may light upon the Ordinary, who shall try if you will be as good as your word. For I long to be made an honest woman.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Pregnancy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Pity.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Chaplain.[Return to reference 6](#)

## SCENE 10

PEACHUM, LOCKIT *with an account book.*

LOCKIT In this last affair, Brother Peachum, we are agreed. You have consented to go halves in Macheath.

PEACHUM We shall never fall out about an execution. But as to that article, pray how stands our last year's account?

LOCKIT If you will run your eye over it, you'll find 'tis fair and clearly stated.

PEACHUM This long arrear<sup>z</sup> of the Government is very hard upon us! Can it be expected that we should hang our acquaintance for nothing, when our betters will hardly save theirs without being paid for it. Unless the people in employment pay better, I promise them for the future, I shall let other rogues live besides their own.

LOCKIT Perhaps, brother, they are afraid these matters may be carried too far. We are treated too by them with contempt, as if our profession were not reputable.

PEACHUM In one respect indeed, our employment may be reckoned dishonest, because, like great statesmen, we encourage those who betray their friends.

LOCKIT Such language, brother, anywhere else, might turn to your prejudice. Learn to be more guarded, I beg you.

AIR 30. How happy are we

*When you censure the age,  
Be cautious and sage,  
Lest the courtiers offended should be:  
If you mention vice or bribe,  
'Tis so pat to all the tribe,  
Each cries, "That was leveled at me!"*



PEACHUM Here's poor Ned Clincher's name, I see. Sure, brother Lockit, there was a little unfair proceeding in Ned's case; for he told me in the condemned hold,<sup>8</sup> that for value received, you had promised him a Session or two longer without molestation.

LOCKIT Mr. Peachum, this is the first time my honor was ever called in question.

PEACHUM Business is at an end if once we act dishonorably.

LOCKIT Who accuses me?

PEACHUM You are warm, brother.

LOCKIT He that attacks my honor, attacks my livelihood. And this usage, sir, is not to be born.

PEACHUM Since you provoke me to speak, I must tell you too that Mrs. Coaxer charges you with defrauding her of her information money, for the apprehending of curl-pated Hugh. Indeed, indeed, brother, we must punctually pay our spies, or we shall have no information.

LOCKIT Is this language to me, sirrah, who have saved you from the gallows, sirrah! [*Collaring each other.*]

PEACHUM If I am hanged, it shall be for ridding the world of an arrant rascal.

LOCKIT This hand shall do the office of the halter<sup>9</sup> you deserve, and throttle you—you dog!

PEACHUM Brother, brother, we are both in the wrong. We shall be both losers in the dispute—for you know we have it in our power to hang each other. You should not be so passionate.

LOCKIT Nor you so provoking.

PEACHUM 'Tis our mutual interest; 'tis for the interest of the world we should agree. If I said anything, brother, to the prejudice of your character, I ask pardon.

LOCKIT Brother Peachum, I can forgive as well as resent. Give me your hand. Suspicion does not become a friend.

PEACHUM I only meant to give you occasion to justify yourself. But I must now step home, for I expect the gentleman about this

snuffbox, that Filch nimmed<sup>1</sup> two nights ago in the park. I appointed him at this hour.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Overdue reward money.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Prison cell.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Moose.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Stole.[Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 11

### LOCKIT, LUCY

LOCKIT    Whence come you, hussy?

LUCY    My tears might answer that question.

LOCKIT    You have then been whimpering and fondling, like a spaniel,  
          over the fellow that hath abused you.

LUCY    One can't help love; one can't cure it. 'Tis not in my power to  
          obey you, and hate him.

LOCKIT    Learn to bear your husband's death like a reasonable  
          woman. 'Tis not the fashion, nowadays, so much as to affect  
          sorrow upon these occasions. No woman would ever marry, if she  
          had not the chance of mortality for a release. Act like a woman of  
          spirit, hussy, and thank your father for what he is doing.

AIR 31.    Of a noble race was Shenkin

LUCY        *Is then his fate decreed, sir?  
              Such a man can I think of quitting?  
              When first we met, so moves me yet,  
              Oh see how my heart is splitting!*

LOCKIT    Look ye, Lucy, there is no saving him. So I think you must  
          even do like other widows: buy yourself weeds,<sup>2</sup> and be cheerful.

AIR 32.    You'll think e'er many days ensue

*You'll think e'er many days ensue  
          This sentence not severe;  
          I hang your husband, child, 'tis true,  
          But with him hang your care.  
          Twang dang dillo dee.*

Like a good wife, go moan over your dying husband. That, child, is your duty. Consider, girl, you can't have the man and the money too. So make yourself as easy as you can, by getting all you can from him.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Mourning clothes. [Return to reference 2](#)

## SCENE 12

### LUCY, MACHEATH

LUCY    Though the Ordinary was out of the way today, I hope; my dear, you will, upon the first opportunity, quiet my scruples. Oh sir! My father's hard heart is not to be softened, and I am in the utmost despair.

MACHEATH    But if I could raise a small sum—would not twenty guineas, think you, move him? Of all the arguments in the way of business, the perquisite<sup>3</sup> is the most prevailing. Your father's perquisites for the escape of prisoners must amount to a considerable sum in the year. Money well timed, and properly applied, will do any thing.

AIR 33.    London ladies

*If you at an office solicit your due,  
And would not have matters neglected,  
You must quicken the clerk with the perquisite too,  
To do what his duty directed.  
Or would you the frowns of a lady prevent,  
She too has this palpable failing,  
The perquisite softens her into consent;  
That reason with all is prevailing.*

LUCY    What love or money can do shall be done; for all my comfort depends upon your safety.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Tip or bribe. [Return to reference 3](#)

## SCENE 13

LUCY, MACHEATH, POLLY

POLLY Where is my dear husband? Was a rope ever intended for this neck! Oh let me throw my arms about it, and throttle thee with love! Why dost thou turn away from me? 'Tis thy Polly! 'Tis thy wife!

MACHEATH Was ever such an unfortunate rascal as I am!

LUCY Was there ever such another villain!

POLLY Oh Macheath! Was it for this we parted? Taken! Imprisoned! Tried! Hanged! Cruel reflection! I'll stay with thee 'till death. No force shall tear thy dear wife from thee now.—What means my love? Not one kind word! Not one kind look! Think what thy Polly suffers to see thee in this condition.

AIR 34. All in the downs

*Thus when the swallow, seeking prey,  
Within the sash<sup>4</sup> is closely pent,  
His consort, with bemoaning lay,  
Without sits pining for th' event.  
Her chattering lovers all around her skim;  
She heeds them not (poor bird!), her soul's with him.*

MACHEATH [*Aside.*] I must disown her. The wench is distracted.

LUCY Am I then bilked of my virtue? Can I have no reparation?  
Sure men were born to lie, and women to believe them! Oh villain!  
Villain!

POLLY Am I not thy wife? Thy neglect of me, thy aversion to me,  
too severely proves it. Look on me. Tell me, am I not thy wife?

LUCY Perfidious wretch!

POLLY Barbarous husband!

LUCY Hadst thou been hanged five months ago, I had been happy.

POLLY And I too. If you had been kind to me 'till death, it would not have vexed me—and that's no very unreasonable request (though from a wife) to a man who hath not above seven or eight days to live.

LUCY Art thou then married to another? Hast thou two wives, monster?

MACHEATH If women's tongues can cease for an answer, hear me.

LUCY I won't. Flesh and blood can't bear my usage.

POLLY Shall I not claim my own? Justice bids me speak.

AIR 35. Have you heard of a frolicsome ditty

MACHEATH *How happy could I be with either,  
Were t'other dear charmer away!  
But while you thus tease me together,  
To neither a word will I say,  
But tol de rol, etc.*

POLLY Sure, my dear, there ought to be some preference shown to a wife. At least she may claim the appearance of it. He must be distracted with his misfortunes, or he could not use me thus!

LUCY Oh villain, villain! Thou hast deceived me. I could even inform against thee with pleasure. Not a prude wishes more heartily to have facts<sup>5</sup> against her intimate acquaintance, than I now wish to have facts against thee. I would have her satisfaction, and they should all out.

AIR 36. Irish trot

POLLY *I'm bubbled.*<sup>6</sup>

LUCY *I'm bubbled.*

POLLY *O how I am troubled!*

LUCY *Bamboozled, and bit!*

POLLY *My distresses are doubled.*

LUCY     *When you come to the tree, should the hangman refuse,  
              These fingers, with pleasure, could fasten the noose.*

POLLY    *I'm bubbled, etc.*

MACHEATH    Be pacified, my dear Lucy. This is all a fetch<sup>2</sup> of Polly's, to make me desperate with you in case I get off. If I am hanged, she would fain have the credit of being thought my widow. Really, Polly, this is no time for a dispute of this sort; for whenever you are talking of marriage, I am thinking of hanging.

POLLY    And hast thou the heart to persist in disowning me?

MACHEATH    And hast thou the heart to persist in persuading me that I am married? Why, Polly, dost thou seek to aggravate my misfortunes?

LUCY     Really, Miss Peachum, you but expose yourself. Besides, 'tis barbarous in you to worry a gentleman in his circumstances.

AIR 37.

POLLY     *Cease your funning;  
              Force or cunning  
              Never shall my heart trapan.<sup>8</sup>  
              All these sallies  
              Are but malice  
              To seduce my constant man.  
              'Tis most certain,  
              By their flirting  
              Women oft have envy shown;  
              Pleased to ruin  
              Others wooing,  
              Never happy in their own!*

Decency, madam, methinks might teach you to behave yourself with some reserve with the husband, while his wife is present.

MACHEATH    But seriously, Polly, this is carrying the joke a little too far.



LUCY If you are determined, madam, to raise a disturbance in the prison, I shall be obliged to send for the turnkey to show you the door. I am sorry, madam, you force me to be so ill-bred.

POLLY Give me leave to tell you, madam, these forward airs don't become you in the least, madam. And my duty, madam, obliges me to stay with my husband, madam.

AIR 38. Good morrow, gossip Joan

LUCY *Why how now, Madam Flirt?  
If you thus must chatter;  
And are for flinging dirt,  
Let's try who best can spatter,  
Madam Flirt!*

POLLY *Why how now, saucy jade?  
Sure the wench is tipsy!*  
[To him.] *How can you see me made  
The scoff of such a gipsy?*  
[To her.] *Saucy jade!*

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Window.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Incriminating information.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Cheated.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Ruse.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Beguile.[Return to reference 8](#)

## SCENE 14

LUCY, MACHEATH, POLLY, PEACHUM

PEACHUM Where's my wench? Ah hussy! Hussy! Come you home, you slut; and when your fellow is hanged, hang yourself, to make your family some amends.

POLLY Dear, dear father, do not tear me from him. I must speak; I have more to say to him—Oh! Twist thy fetters about me, that he may not haul me from thee!

PEACHUM Sure all women are alike! If ever they commit the folly, they are sure to commit another by exposing themselves. Away, not a word more. You are my prisoner now, hussy.

AIR 39. Irish howl

POLLY *No power on earth can e'er divide  
The knot that sacred love hath tied.  
When parents draw against our mind,  
The true-love's knot they faster bind.  
Oh, oh ray, oh Amborah—oh, oh, etc.*

[*Holding* MACHEATH, PEACHUM *pulling her.*]

## SCENE 15

### LUCY, MACHEATH

MACHEATH I am naturally compassionate, wife, so that I could not use the wench as she deserved; which made you at first suspect there was something in what she said.

LUCY Indeed, my dear, I was strangely puzzled.

MACHEATH If that had been the case, her father would never have brought me into this circumstance. No, Lucy, I had rather die than be false to thee.

LUCY How happy am I, if you say this from your heart! For I love thee so, that I could sooner bear to see thee hanged than in the arms of another.

MACHEATH But couldst thou bear to see me hanged?

LUCY O Macheath, I can never live to see that day.

MACHEATH You see, Lucy, in the account of love you are in my debt, and you must now be convinced that I rather choose to die than be another's. Make me, if possible, love thee more, and let me owe my life to thee. If you refuse to assist me, Peachum and your father will immediately put me beyond all means of escape.

LUCY My father, I know, hath been drinking hard with the prisoners, and I fancy he is now taking his nap in his own room. If I can procure the keys, shall I go off with thee, my dear?

MACHEATH If we are together, 'twill be impossible to lie concealed. As soon as the search begins to be a little cool, I will send to thee. 'Till then my heart is thy prisoner.

LUCY Come then, my dear husband, owe thy life to me. And though you love me not, be grateful. But that Polly runs in my head strangely.

MACHEATH A moment of time may make us unhappy forever.

AIR 40. The lass of Patie's mill

LUCY *I like the fox shall grieve,*

*Whose mate hath left her side,  
Whom hounds, from morn to eve,  
Chase o'er the country wide.  
Where can my lover hide?  
Where cheat the weary pack?  
If love be not his guide,  
He never will come back!*

### ***Act 3***

## SCENE 1 *Newgate*

### LOCKIT, LUCY

LOCKIT To be sure, wench, you must have been aiding and abetting to help him to this escape.

LUCY Sir, here hath been Peachum and his daughter Polly, and to be sure they know the ways of Newgate as well as if they had been born and bred in the place all their lives. Why must all your suspicion light upon me?

LOCKIT Lucy, Lucy, I will have none of these shuffling<sup>9</sup> answers.

LUCY Well then—if I know anything of him I wish I may be burnt!

LOCKIT Keep your temper, Lucy, or I shall pronounce you guilty.

LUCY Keep yours, sir. I do wish I may be burnt. I do. And what can I say more to convince you?

LOCKIT Did he tip handsomely? How much did he come down with? Come hussy, don't cheat your father, and I shall not be angry with you. Perhaps you have made a better bargain with him than I could have done. How much, my good girl?

LUCY You know, sir, I am fond of him, and would have given money to have kept him with me.

LOCKIT Ah Lucy! Thy education might have put thee more upon thy guard, for a girl in the bar of an ale house is always besieged.

LUCY Dear sir, mention not my education, for 'twas to that I owe my ruin.

AIR 41. If love's a sweet passion

*When young at the bar you first taught me to score,  
And bid me be free of my lips, and no more,  
I was kissed by the parson, the squire, and the sot;  
When the guest was departed, the kiss was forgot.  
But his kiss was so sweet, and so closely he pressed,  
That I languished and pined 'till I granted the rest.*

If you can forgive me, sir, I will make a fair confession, for to be sure he hath been a most barbarous villain to me.

LOCKIT And so you have let him escape, hussy, have you?

LUCY When a woman loves, a kind look, a tender word can persuade her to anything. And I could ask no other bribe.

LOCKIT Thou wilt always be a vulgar slut, Lucy. If you would not be looked upon as a fool, you should never do anything but upon the foot of interest. Those that act otherwise are their own bubbles.<sup>1</sup>

LUCY But love, sir, is a misfortune that may happen to the most discreet woman, and in love we are all fools alike. Notwithstanding all he swore, I am now fully convinced that Polly Peachum is actually his wife. Did I let him escape (fool that I was!) to go to her? Polly will wheedle herself into his money, and then Peachum will hang him, and cheat us both.

LOCKIT So I am to be ruined because, forsooth, you must be in love! A very pretty excuse!

LUCY I could murder that impudent happy strumpet. I gave him his life, and that creature enjoys the sweets of it. Ungrateful Macheath!

AIR 42. South Sea ballad

*My love is all madness and folly,  
Alone I lie,  
Toss, tumble, and cry,  
What a happy creature is Polly!  
Was e'er such a wretch as I!  
With rage I redden like scarlet,  
That my dear inconstant varlet,  
Stark blind to my charms,  
Is lost in the arms  
Of that jilt, that inveigling harlot!  
Stark blind to my charms,  
Is lost in the arms*

*Of that jilt, that inveigling harlot!  
This, this my resentment alarms.*

LOCKIT    And so, after all this mischief, I must stay here to be entertained with your caterwauling, Mistress Puss! Out of my sight, wanton strumpet! You shall fast and mortify yourself into reason, with now and then a little handsome discipline to bring you to your senses. Go.

## **Endnotes**

- Note 9: Evasive. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Dupes. [Return to reference 1](#)



## SCENE 2

### LOCKIT

Peachum then intends to outwit me in this affair; but I'll be even with him. The dog is leaky<sup>2</sup> in his liquor, so I'll ply him that way, get the secret from him, and turn this affair to my own advantage. Lions, wolves, and vultures don't live together in herds, droves, or flocks. Of all animals of prey, man is the only sociable one. Every one of us preys upon his neighbor, and yet we herd together. Peachum is my companion, my friend. According to the custom of the world, indeed, he may quote thousands of precedents for cheating me. And shall not I make use of the privilege of friendship to make him a return?

AIR 43.    Packington's pound

*Thus gamesters united in friendship are found,  
Though they know that their industry all is a cheat;  
They flock to their prey at the dice-box's sound,  
And join to promote one another's deceit.  
But if by mishap  
They fail of a chap,<sup>3</sup>  
To keep in their hands, they each other entrap.  
Like pikes, lank with hunger, who miss of their ends,  
They bite their companions, and prey on their  
friends.*

Now, Peachum, you and I, like honest tradesmen, are to have a fair trial which of us two can overreach the other. Lucy! [*Enter LUCY.*] Are there any of Peachum's people now in the house?

LUCY    Filch, sir, is drinking a quartern<sup>4</sup> of strong waters in the next room with Black Moll.

LOCKIT    Bid him come to me.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: A blabbermouth. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Customer or sucker. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Quarter of a pint. [Return to reference 4](#)

### SCENE 3

#### LOCKIT, FILCH

LOCKIT    Why, boy, thou lookest as if thou wert half starved, like a shotten herring.<sup>5</sup>

FILCH    One had need have the constitution of a horse to go through the business. Since the favorite child-getter<sup>6</sup> was disabled by a mishap, I have picked up a little money by helping the ladies to a pregnancy against their being called down to sentence. But if a man cannot get an honest livelihood any easier way, I am sure 'tis what I can't undertake for another Session.

LOCKIT    Truly, if that great man should tip off,<sup>7</sup> 'twould be an irreparable loss. The vigor and prowess of a knight-errant never saved half the ladies in distress that he hath done. But, boy, can'st thou tell me where thy master is to be found?

FILCH    At his lock, sir, at the Crooked Billet.

LOCKIT    Very well. I have nothing more with you. [*Exit* FILCH.] I'll go to him there, for I have many important affairs to settle with him; and in the way of those transactions, I'll artfully get into his secret. So that Macheath shall not remain a day longer out of my clutches.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: A herring exhausted by spawning. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Stud. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Die. [Return to reference 7](#)

## SCENE 4 *A gaming-house*

**MACHEATH** *in a fine tarnished coat*, **BEN BUDGE**, **MATT OF THE MINT**.

**MACHEATH** I am sorry, gentlemen, the road was so barren of money. When my friends are in difficulties, I am always glad that my fortune can be serviceable to them. [*Gives them money.*] You see, gentlemen, I am not a mere court friend, who professes everything and will do nothing.

AIR 44. Lillibullero

*The modes of the court so common are grown,  
That a true friend can hardly be met;  
Friendship for interest is but a loan,  
Which they let out for what they can get.  
'Tis true, you find  
Some friends so kind,  
Who will give you good counsel themselves to  
defend.  
In sorrowful ditty,  
They promise, they pity,  
But shift you for money, from friend to friend.*

But we, gentlemen, have still honor enough to break through the corruptions of the world. And while I can serve you, you may command me.

**BEN** It grieves my heart that so generous a man should be involved in such difficulties, as oblige him to live with such ill company, and herd with gamesters.

**MATT** See the partiality of mankind! One man may steal a horse, better than another look over a hedge.<sup>8</sup> Of all mechanics,<sup>9</sup> of all servile handicraftsmen, a gamester is the vilest. But yet, as many

of the quality are of the profession, he is admitted amongst the politest company. I wonder we are not more respected.

MACHEATH There will be deep play tonight at Marybone, and consequently money may be picked up upon the road. Meet me there, and I'll give you the hint who is worth setting.<sup>1</sup>

MATT The fellow with a brown coat with a narrow gold binding, I am told, is never without money.

MACHEATH What do you mean, Matt? Sure you will not think of meddling with him! He's a good honest kind of a fellow, and one of us.

BEN To be sure, sir, we will put ourselves under your direction.

MACHEATH Have an eye upon the moneylenders. A rouleau,<sup>2</sup> or two, would prove a pretty sort of an expedition. I hate extortion.

MATT Those rouleaus are very pretty things. I hate your bank bills; there is such a hazard in putting them off.<sup>3</sup>

MACHEATH There is a certain man of distinction, who in his time hath nicked me out of a great deal of the ready.<sup>4</sup> He is in my cash,<sup>5</sup> Ben. I'll point him out to you this evening, and you shall draw upon him for the debt. The company are met; I hear the dicebox in the other room. So, gentlemen, your servant. You'll meet me at Marybone.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: That is, a mere look at a horse can get some people in trouble.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Workers who use their hands.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Robbing.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Roll of gold coins.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Converting them into money.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Money.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: He owes me.[Return to reference 5](#)

## SCENE 5 *Peachum's Lock*

***A table with wine, brandy, pipes, and tobacco.***

PEACHUM, LOCKIT

LOCKIT The Coronation account,<sup>6</sup> brother Peachum, is of so intricate a nature, that I believe it will never be settled.

PEACHUM It consists indeed of a great variety of articles. It was worth to our people, in fees of different kinds, above ten installments.<sup>7</sup> This is part of the account, brother, that lies open before us.

LOCKIT A lady's tail<sup>8</sup>—of rich brocade—that, I see, is disposed of.

PEACHUM To Mrs. Diana Trapes, the tallywoman, and she will make a good hand on't in shoes and slippers, to trick out young ladies, upon their going into keeping.<sup>9</sup>

LOCKIT But I don't see any article of the jewels.

PEACHUM Those are so well known, that they must be sent abroad. You'll find them entered under the article of exportation. As for the snuffboxes, watches, swords, etc., I thought it best to enter them under their several heads.

LOCKIT Seven and twenty women's pockets<sup>1</sup> complete, with the several things therein contained; all sealed, numbered, and entered.

PEACHUM But, brother, it is impossible for us now to enter upon this affair. We should have the whole day before us. Besides, the account of the last half year's plate<sup>2</sup> is in a book by itself, which lies at the other office.

LOCKIT Bring us then more liquor. Today shall be for pleasure, tomorrow for business. Ah brother, those daughters of ours are two slippery hussies. Keep a watchful eye upon Polly, and Macheath in a day or two shall be our own again.

AIR 45. Down in the North Country

*What gudgeons<sup>3</sup> are we men!  
Every woman's easy prey.  
Though we have felt the hook, again*

*We bite and they betray.*

*The bird that hath been trapped,  
When he hears his calling mate,  
To her he flies, again he's clapped  
Within the wiry grate.*

PEACHUM But what signifies catching the bird, if your daughter Lucy will set open the door of the cage?

LOCKIT If men were answerable for the follies and frailties of their wives and daughters, no friends could keep a good correspondence together for two days. This is unkind of you, brother; for among good friends, what they say or do goes for nothing.

*[Enter a SERVANT.]*

SERVANT Sir, here's Mrs. Diana Trapes wants to speak with you.

PEACHUM Shall we admit her, brother Lockit?

LOCKIT By all means. She's a good customer, and a fine-spoken woman. And a woman who drinks and talks so freely, will enliven the conversation.

PEACHUM Desire her to walk in.

*[Exit SERVANT.]*

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Register of goods stolen during the coronation of George II (1727). [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Public installations of the new lord mayor of London. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Train. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Becoming mistresses. [Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Purses worn around the waist.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Silver or gold utensils.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Minnows.[Return to reference 3](#)



## SCENE 6

### PEACHUM, LOCKIT, MRS. TRAPES

PEACHUM Dear Mrs. Dye, your servant. One may know by your kiss that your gin is excellent.

MRS. TRAPES I was always very curious<sup>4</sup> in my liquors.

LOCKIT There is no perfumed breath like it. I have been long acquainted with the flavor of those lips, han't I, Mrs. Dye?

MRS. TRAPES Fill it up. I take as large draughts of liquor, as I did of love. I hate a flincher in either.

AIR 46. A shepherd kept sheep

*In the days of my youth I could bill like a dove, fa,  
la, la, etc.*

*Like a sparrow at all times was ready for love, fa, la,  
la, etc.*

*The life of all mortals in kissing should pass,  
Lip to lip while we're young—then the lip to the  
glass, fa, etc.*

But now, Mr. Peachum, to our business. If you have blacks of any kind, brought in of late, mantoos<sup>5</sup>—velvet scarfs, petticoats—let it be what it will, I am your chap. For all my ladies are very fond of mourning.

PEACHUM Why, look ye, Mrs. Dye, you deal so hard with us that we can afford to give the gentlemen who venture their lives for the goods little or nothing.

MRS. TRAPES The hard times oblige me to go very near<sup>6</sup> in my dealing. To be sure, of late years I have been a great sufferer by the Parliament—three thousand pounds would hardly make me amends. The Act for destroying the Mint<sup>7</sup> was a severe cut upon our business. 'Till then, if a customer stepped out of the way, we

knew where to have her. No doubt you know Mrs. Coaxer. There's a wench now (till today) with a good suit of clothes of mine upon her back, and I could never set eyes upon her for three months together. Since the Act too against imprisonment for small sums,<sup>8</sup> my loss there too hath been very considerable, and it must be so, when a lady can borrow a handsome petticoat or a clean gown, and I not have the least hank<sup>9</sup> upon her! And o' my conscience, nowadays most ladies take a delight in cheating, when they can do it with safety.

PEACHUM     Madam, you had a handsome gold watch of us t'other day for seven guineas. Considering we must have our profit, to a gentleman upon the road, a gold watch will be scarce worth the taking.

MRS. TRAPES     Consider, Mr. Peachum, that watch was remarkable, and not of very safe sale. If you have any black velvet scarfs, they are a handsome winter wear, and take with most gentlemen who deal with my customers. 'Tis I that put the ladies upon a good foot. 'Tis not youth or beauty that fixes their price. The gentlemen always pay according to their dress, from half a crown to two guineas; and yet those hussies make nothing of bilking of me. Then too, allowing for accidents—I have eleven fine customers now down under the surgeon's hands. What with fees and other expenses, there are great goings-out, and no comings-in, and not a farthing to pay for at least a month's clothing. We run great risks, great risks indeed.

PEACHUM     As I remember, you said something just now of Mrs. Coaxer.

MRS. TRAPES     Yes, sir. To be sure I stripped her of a suit of my own clothes about two hours ago; and have left her as she should be, in her shift, with a lover of hers at my house. She called him upstairs, as he was going to Marybone in a hackney coach. And I hope, for her own sake and mine, she will persuade the Captain to redeem her, for the Captain is very generous to the ladies.

LOCKIT     What Captain?

MRS. TRAPES     He thought I did not know him. An intimate acquaintance of yours, Mr. Peachum. Only Captain Macheath—as fine as a lord.

PEACHUM     Tomorrow, dear Mrs. Dye, you shall set your own price upon any of the goods you like. We have at least half a dozen velvet scarfs, and all at your service. Will you give me leave to make you a present of this suit of night-clothes for your own wearing? But are you sure it is Captain Macheath?

MRS. TRAPES     Though he thinks I have forgot him, nobody knows him better. I have taken a great deal of the Captain's money in my time at second hand, for he always loved to have his ladies well dressed.

PEACHUM     Mr. Lockit and I have a little business with the Captain—you understand me—and we will satisfy you for Mrs. Coaxer's debt.

LOCKIT     Depend upon it. We will deal like men of honor.

MRS. TRAPES     I don't inquire after your affairs, so whatever happens, I wash my hands on't. It hath always been my maxim, that one friend should assist another. But if you please, I'll take one of the scarfs home with me. 'Tis always good to have something in hand.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Choosy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mantles or cloaks. "Blacks": mourning clothes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Stingy.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The status of the Mint district as a sanctuary for outlaws had been undermined by recent statutes.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Previous to this act, someone could be arrested for owing any sum, however small.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Hold.[Return to reference 9](#)

## SCENE 7 *Newgate*

LUCY

Jealousy, rage, love, and fear are at once tearing me to pieces.  
How I am weather-beaten and shattered with distresses!

AIR 47. One evening, having lost my way

*I'm like a skiff on the ocean tossed,  
Now high, now low, with each billow born,  
With her rudder broke, and her anchor lost,  
Deserted and all forlorn.  
While thus I lie rolling and tossing all night,  
That Polly lies sporting on seas of delight!  
Revenge, revenge, revenge,  
Shall appease my restless sprite.*

I have the ratsbane<sup>1</sup> ready. I run no risk, for I can lay her death upon the gin, and so many die of that naturally that I shall never be called in question. But say I were to be hanged—I never could be hanged for anything that would give me greater comfort than the poisoning that slut.

[*Enter* FILCH.]

FILCH Madam, here's our Miss Polly come to wait upon you.

LUCY Show her in.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Poison. [Return to reference 1](#)

## SCENE 8

LUCY, POLLY

LUCY Dear madam, your servant. I hope you will pardon my passion when I was so happy to see you last. I was so overrun with the spleen<sup>2</sup> that I was perfectly out of myself. And really when one hath the spleen, everything is to be excused by a friend.

AIR 48. Now Roger, I'll tell thee, because thou'rt my son

*When a wife's in her pout,  
(As she's sometimes, no doubt!)  
The good husband as meek as a lamb,  
Her vapors<sup>3</sup> to still,  
First grants her her will,  
And the quieting draught is a dram.  
Poor man! And the quieting draught is a dram.*

I wish all our quarrels might have so comfortable a reconciliation.

POLLY I have no excuse for my own behavior, madam, but my misfortunes. And really, madam, I suffer too upon your account.

LUCY But, Miss Polly, in the way of friendship, will you give me leave to propose a glass of cordial to you?

POLLY Strong waters are apt to give me the headache. I hope, madam, you will excuse me.

LUCY Not the greatest lady in the land could have better in her closet,<sup>4</sup> for her own private drinking. You seem mighty low in spirits, my dear.

POLLY I am sorry, madam, my health will not allow me to accept of your offer. I should not have left you in the rude manner I did when we met last, madam, had not my papa hauled me away so unexpectedly. I was indeed somewhat provoked, and perhaps

might use some expressions that were disrespectful. But really, madam, the Captain treated me with so much contempt and cruelty that I deserved your pity rather than your resentment.

LUCY But since his escape, no doubt all matters are made up again. Ah Polly, Polly! 'Tis I am the unhappy wife, and he loves you as if you were only his mistress.

POLLY Sure, madam, you cannot think me so happy as to be the object of your jealousy. A man is always afraid of a woman who loves him too well, so that I must expect to be neglected and avoided.

LUCY Then our cases, my dear Polly, are exactly alike. Both of us indeed have been too fond.

AIR 49. O Bessy Bell

POLLY *A curse attends that woman's love,  
Who always would be pleasing.*

LUCY *The pertness of the billing dove,  
Like tickling, is but teasing.*

POLLY *What then in love can woman do?*

LUCY *If we grow fond they shun us.*

POLLY *And when we fly them, they pursue.*

LUCY *But leave us when they've won us.*

Love is so very whimsical in both sexes, that it is impossible to be lasting. But my heart is particular, and contradicts my own observation.

POLLY But really, Mistress Lucy, by his last behavior I think I ought to envy you. When I was forced from him, he did not show the least tenderness. But perhaps he hath a heart not capable of it.

AIR 50. Would Fate to me Belinda give

*Among the men, coquettes we find,*

*Who court by turns all womankind;  
And we grant all their hearts desired,  
When they are flattered, and admired.*

The coquettes of both sexes are self-lovers, and that is a love no other whatever can dispossess. I fear, my dear Lucy, our husband is one of those.

LUCY    Away with these melancholy reflections. Indeed, my dear Polly, we are both of us a cup too low. Let me prevail upon you, to accept of my offer.

AIR 51.    Come, sweet lass

*Come sweet lass,  
Let's banish sorrow  
'Till tomorrow;  
Come, sweet lass,  
Let's take a chirping<sup>5</sup> glass.  
Wine can clear  
The vapors of despair,  
And make us light as air;  
Then drink, and banish care.*

I can't bear, child, to see you in such low spirits. And I must persuade you to what I know will do you good. [*Aside.*] I shall now soon be even with the hypocritical strumpet.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Fashionable seizure of peevishness or melancholy.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Ill humor or whims.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Small private room.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cheering.[Return to reference 5](#)

## **SCENE 9**

### **POLLY**

All this wheedling of Lucy cannot be for nothing. At this time too, when I know she hates me! The dissembling of a woman is always the forerunner of mischief. By pouring strong waters down my throat, she thinks to pump some secrets out of me. I'll be upon my guard, and won't taste a drop of her liquor, I'm resolved.



## SCENE 10

**LUCY, *with strong waters*. POLLY.**

LUCY Come, Miss Polly.

POLLY Indeed, child, you have given yourself trouble to no purpose.  
You must, my dear, excuse me.

LUCY Really, Miss Polly, you are so squeamishly affected about taking a cup of strong waters as a lady before company. I vow, Polly, I shall take it monstrously ill if you refuse me. Brandy and men (though women love them never so well) are always taken by us with some reluctance—unless 'tis in private.

POLLY I protest, madam, it goes against me.—What do I see! Macheath again in custody! Now every glimmering of happiness is lost. [*Drops the glass of liquor on the ground.*]

LUCY [*Aside.*] Since things are thus, I'm glad the wench hath escaped; for by this event, 'tis plain she was not happy enough to deserve to be poisoned.

## SCENE 11<sup>6</sup>

### LOCKIT, MACHEATH, PEACHUM, LUCY, POLLY

LOCKIT    Set your heart to rest, Captain. You have neither the chance of love or money for another escape, for you are ordered to be called down upon your trial immediately.

PEACHUM    Away, hussies! This is not a time for a man to be hampered with his wives. You see, the gentleman is in chains already.

LUCY    O husband, husband, my heart longed to see thee; but to see thee thus distracts me!

POLLY    Will not my dear husband look upon his Polly? Why hadst thou not flown to me for protection? With me thou hadst been safe.

AIR 52.    The last time I went o'er the moor

POLLY    *Hither, dear husband, turn your eyes.*

LUCY    *Bestow one glance to cheer me.*

POLLY    *Think with that look, thy Polly dies.*

LUCY    *O shun me not, but hear me.*

POLLY    *'Tis Polly sues.*

LUCY    *—'Tis Lucy speaks.*

POLLY    *Is thus true love requited?*

LUCY    *My heart is bursting*

POLLY    *—Mine too breaks.*

LUCY    *Must I—*

POLLY    *—Must I be slighted?*

MACHEATH    What would you have me say, ladies? You see, this affair will soon be at an end, without my disobliging either of you.

PEACHUM    But the settling this point, Captain, might prevent a lawsuit between your two widows.

AIR 53. Tom Tinker's my true love

MACHEATH *Which way shall I turn me? How can I decide?  
Wives, the day of our death, are as fond as a bride.  
One wife is too much for most husbands to hear,  
But two at a time there's no mortal can bear.  
This way, and that way, and which way I will,  
What would comfort the one, t'other wife would take  
ill.*

POLLY But if his own misfortunes have made him insensible to mine, a father sure will be more compassionate. Dear, dear sir, sink<sup>z</sup> the material evidence, and bring him off at his trial. Polly upon her knees begs it of you.

AIR 54. I am a poor shepherd undone

*When my hero in court appears,  
And stands arraigned for his life,  
Then think of poor Polly's tears;  
For ah! Poor Polly's his wife.  
Like the sailor he holds up his hand,  
Distressed on the dashing wave.  
To die a dry death at land,  
Is as bad as a wat'ry grave.  
And alas, poor Polly!  
Alack, and well-a-day!  
Before I was in love,  
Oh! every month was May.*

LUCY If Peachum's heart is hardened, sure you, sir, will have more compassion on a daughter. I know the evidence is in your power: how then can you be a tyrant to me? [*Kneeling.*]

AIR 55. Ianthe the lovely

*When he holds up his hand arraigned for his life,  
Oh think of your daughter, and think I'm his wife!  
What are cannons, or bombs, or clashing of swords?  
For death is more certain by witnesses' words.  
Then nail up their lips, that dread thunder allay;  
And each month of my life will hereafter be May.*

LOCKIT Macheath's time is come, Lucy. We know our own affairs,  
therefore let us have no more whimpering or whining.

AIR 56. A cobbler there was

*Ourselves, like the great, to secure a retreat,  
When matters require it, must give up our gang.  
And good reason why,  
Or, instead of the fry,  
Even Peachum and I,  
Like poor petty rascals, might hang, hang;  
Like poor petty rascals, might hang.*

PEACHUM Set your heart at rest, Polly. Your husband is to die today.  
Therefore, if you are not already provided, 'tis high time to look  
about for another. There's comfort for you, you slut.

LOCKIT We are ready, sir, to conduct you to the Old Bailey.

AIR 57. Bonny Dundee

MACHEATH *The charge is prepared; the lawyers are met;  
The judges all ranged (a terrible show!).  
I go, undismayed, for death is a debt,  
A debt on demand. So take what I owe.*

*Then farewell my love—dear charmers, adieu.  
Contented I die—'tis the better for you.  
Here ends all dispute the rest of our lives,  
For this way at once I please all my wives.*

Now, gentlemen, I am ready to attend you.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: For an illustration of this scene by William Hogarth, See the Image Gallery for this volume. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Suppress. [Return to reference 7](#)

## SCENE 12

LUCY, POLLY, FILCH

POLLY Follow them, Filch, to the court. And when the trial is over, bring me a particular account of his behavior, and of everything that happened. You'll find me here with Miss Lucy. [*Exit* FILCH.] But why is all this music?

LUCY The prisoners whose trials are put off till next Session are diverting themselves.

POLLY Sure there is nothing so charming as music, I'm fond of it to distraction. But alas! Now all mirth seems an insult upon my affliction. Let us retire, my dear Lucy, and indulge our sorrows. The noisy crew, you see, are coming upon us. [*Exeunt.*]  
[*A Dance of Prisoners in Chains, etc.*]

**SCENE 13 *The condemned hold***

**MACHEATH, *in a melancholy posture.***

AIR 58. Happy groves

*O cruel, cruel, cruel case!  
Must I suffer this disgrace?*

AIR 59. Of all the girls that are so smart

*Of all the friends in time of grief,  
When threat'ning death looks grimmer,  
Not one so sure can bring relief,  
As this best friend, a brimmer.<sup>8</sup>[Drinks.]*

AIR 60. Britons strike home

*Since I must swing, I scorn, I scorn to wince or  
whine.[Rises.]*

AIR 61. Chevy Chase

*But now again my spirits sink;  
I'll raise them high with wine.  
[Drinks a glass of wine.]*

AIR 62. To old Sir Simon the King

*But valor the stronger grows,  
The stronger liquor we're drinking.*

*And how can we feel our woes,  
When we've lost the trouble of thinking?[Drinks.]*

AIR 63. Joy to great Caesar

*If thus—A man can die  
Much bolder with brandy.  
[Pours out a bumper of brandy.]*

AIR 64. There was an old woman

*So I drink off this bumper. And now I can stand the  
test.  
And my comrades shall see, that I die as brave as  
the best.[Drinks.]*

AIR 65. Did you ever hear of a gallant sailor

*But can I leave my pretty hussies,  
Without one tear, or tender sigh?*

AIR 66. Why are mine eyes still flowing

*Their eyes, their lips, their busses<sup>9</sup>  
Recall my love. Ah must I die?*

AIR 67. Green sleeves

*Since laws were made for every degree,  
To curb vice in others, as well as me,  
I wonder we han't better company,*



*Upon Tyburn Tree!*  
*But gold from law can take out the sting;*  
*And if rich men like us were to swing,*  
*'Twould thin the land, such numbers to string*  
*Upon Tyburn Tree!*

JAILER    Some friends of yours, Captain, desire to be admitted. I  
            leave you together.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Brimming goblet. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Kisses. [Return to reference 9](#)

## SCENE 14

**MACHEATH, BEN BUDGE, MATT OF THE MINT**

MACHEATH For my having broke prison, you see, gentlemen, I am ordered immediate execution. The sheriff's officers, I believe, are now at the door. That Jemmy Twitcher should peach me, I own surprised me! 'Tis a plain proof that the world is all alike, and that even our gang can no more trust one another than other people. Therefore, I beg you, gentlemen, look well to yourselves, for in all probability you may live some months longer.

MATT We are heartily sorry, Captain, for your misfortune. But 'tis what we must all come to.

MACHEATH Peachum and Lockit, you know, are infamous scoundrels. Their lives are as much in your power as yours are in theirs. Remember your dying friend! 'Tis my last request. Bring those villains to the gallows before you, and I am satisfied.

MATT We'll do't.

JAILER Miss Polly and Miss Lucy entreat a word with you.

MACHEATH Gentlemen, adieu.

## SCENE 15

### LUCY, MACHEATH, POLLY

MACHEATH Lucy, my dear Polly, whatsoever hath passed between us is now at an end. If you are fond of marrying again, the best advice I can give you, is to ship yourselves off for the West Indies,<sup>1</sup> where you'll have a fair chance of getting a husband apiece; or by good luck, two or three, as you like best.

POLLY How can I support this sight!

LUCY There is nothing moves one so much as a great man in distress.

AIR 68. All you that must take a leap

LUCY *Would I might be hanged!*

POLLY *And I would so too!*

LUCY *To be hanged with you.*

POLLY *My dear, with you.*

MACHEATH *O leave me to thought! I fear! I doubt!*

*I tremble! I droop! See, my courage is out.*

*[Turns up the empty bottle.]*

POLLY *No token of love?*

MACHEATH *See, my courage is out.*

*[Turns up the empty pot.]*

LUCY *No token of love?*

POLLY *Adieu.*

LUCY *Farewell.*

MACHEATH *But hark! I hear the toll of the bell.<sup>2</sup>*

CHORUS *Tol de rol lol, etc.*

JAILER Four women more, Captain, with a child apiece! See, here they come. *[Enter women and children.]*

MACHEATH    What—four wives more! This is too much. Here—tell the sheriff's officers I am ready. [*Exit* MACHEATH *guarded.*]

## Endnotes

- Note 1: In the sequel to *The Beggar's Opera*, Polly does find a husband in the West Indies, where fortunes could be made. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rung five minutes before the condemned were taken to Tyburn. [Return to reference 2](#)

## SCENE 16

***To them, enter PLAYER and BEGGAR.***

PLAYER But, honest friend, I hope you don't intend that Macheath shall be really executed.

BEGGAR Most certainly, sir. To make the piece perfect, I was for doing strict poetical justice. Macheath is to be hanged; and for the other personages of the drama, the audience must have supposed they were all either hanged or transported.

PLAYER Why then, friend, this is a downright deep tragedy. The catastrophe is manifestly wrong, for an opera must end happily.

BEGGAR Your objection, sir, is very just, and is easily removed. For you must allow that in this kind of drama 'tis no matter how absurdly things are brought about. So—you rabble there—run and cry a reprieve. Let the prisoner be brought back to his wives in triumph.

PLAYER All this we must do, to comply with the taste of the town.

BEGGAR Through the whole piece you may observe such a similitude of manners in high and low life, that it is difficult to determine whether (in the fashionable vices) the fine gentlemen imitate the gentlemen of the road, or the gentlemen of the road the fine gentlemen. Had the play remained as I at first intended, it would have carried a most excellent moral. 'Twould have shown that the lower sort of people have their vices in a degree as well as the rich, and that they are punished for them.<sup>3</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 3: *Unlike* the rich. [Return to reference 3](#)

## SCENE 17

***To them, MACHEATH with rabble, etc.***

MACHEATH    So, it seems, I am not left to my choice, but must have a wife at last. Look ye, my dears, we will have no controversy now. Let us give this day to mirth, and I am sure she who thinks herself my wife will testify her joy by a dance.

ALL    Come, a dance, a dance.

MACHEATH    Ladies, I hope you will give me leave to present a partner to each of you. And (if I may without offense) for this time, I take Polly for mine. [*To POLLY.*] And for life, you slut, for we were really married. As for the rest—But at present keep your own secret.

### A DANCE

AIR 69.    Lumps of pudding

*Thus I stand like the Turk, with his doxies around;  
From all sides their glances his passion confound;  
For black, brown, and fair, his inconstancy burns,  
And the different beauties subdue him by turns;  
Each calls forth her charms, to provoke his desires;  
Though willing to all, with but one he retires.  
But think of this maxim, and put off your sorrow,  
The wretch of today may be happy tomorrow.*

CHORUS    *But think of this maxim, etc.*

FINIS

# **LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU**

## **1689–1762**

In her early teens Lady Mary Pierrepont did something that well-bred young women were not supposed to do: she secretly taught herself Latin. The act reveals many of the traits that would also characterize her as a mature woman: curiosity, love of learning, intelligence, ambition, and independence of mind. The eldest daughter of a wealthy Whig peer (he later became marquess of Dorchester), she grew up amid a glittering London circle that included Addison, Steele, Congreve, and later Pope and Gay. She began writing, circulating some of her poems among friends but also publishing, including a contribution to the *Spectator*. She was not content to live the life of a dutiful aristocratic daughter. Unlike most women in her time, she married for love, and when her husband, Edward Wortley Montagu, was appointed ambassador to Constantinople in 1716, she took advantage of the opportunity by traveling through Europe and studying the language and customs of Turkey. Returning home in 1718, she spent unhappy years that included bitter political quarrels with Pope and the gradual failure of her marriage. Then, in middle age, she fell in love with a young Italian author, Francesco Algarotti. In 1739 she traveled to Italy hoping to see him; but the passion that had kindled in their letters was soon quenched when he failed to join her. The rest of her life was passed abroad, in Avignon, France, and in Brescia and Venice, Italy. She died soon after her return to London, in 1762.

In a century that included many of the great letter writers in English—Gray, Horace Walpole, William Cowper, and others—Montagu is one of the greatest. She had saved her correspondence from 1716 to 1718, which centered on her experiences in the Ottoman Empire, and in the year before she died, she deposited a manuscript version with a Protestant clergyman, intending it to be published. *Letters . . . Written during Her Travels* appeared, posthumously, in 1763. “What fire, what ease, what knowledge of Europe and Asia!” the eminent historian Edward Gibbon exclaimed of the work. Montagu had traveled as a young woman with the deliberate ambition to gain such knowledge. Before arriving in Turkey, she undertook the project of understanding its culture in conversations with an Islamic scholar in Belgrade, and her curiosity led her to a multitude of revealing, provocative situations, on which she reflects with acuity and wit. She approvingly describes the liberties given to women by Turkish customs and institutions, such as the veils that rendered a woman incognito in the street (the better, she thought, to conduct secret love affairs). Letter XXXI explains the technique of smallpox inoculation in Turkey. Montagu would earn a place in medical history for her brave introduction of the practice to Britain on her return (her son and daughter were among the first to be inoculated), arousing resistance from doctors (as she predicts) and from fearful people in general. The admiring frankness of Montagu’s description of the communal nudity of women in Turkish baths, in Letter XXVI, disturbed and shocked readers when the letters were finally published. Her correspondence presents two subjects to which many British readers at the time were unaccustomed: a complex, formidable civilization beyond Europe’s borders, and the independent, brilliant perceptions of a woman able to view the norms of her own society critically in light of those of another.

From an early age Montagu wrote in many literary forms: essays, poems, fiction, and even a translated play. In her own time she was especially admired as a poet. When Pope, after their quarrel, gave her the name “Sappho” in his poem “Epistle to a Lady,” he was



doubtless betraying the nervousness that many men felt in the presence of intelligent women (the Greek poet Sappho, after all, preferred women to men); yet Pope was also associating her with the classic author of lyric verse. Montagu's poems, although often casual, reveal the mind of a woman who is not willing to accept the stereotypes imposed upon her by men. Like her friend Mary Astell, Montagu puts her trust in education and reason, not in the opinions of others, and she insists on preserving her freedom of choice. A woman, Montagu's poems suggest, need not defer to a man who is less than her equal; she must look to her own satisfaction before she looks to his, and she retains the right to say no. Her poetry, like her travel writing, displays an energetic, witty, candid mind, alert to contradictions and differences in points of view, which she deftly orchestrates to present her reader with a fuller, more interesting world.

# Saturday. The Small Pox<sup>1</sup>

FLAVIA:<sup>2</sup>

The wretched Flavia on her couch reclined,  
Thus breathed the anguish of a wounded mind;  
A glass<sup>o</sup> reversed in her right hand she bore,  
For now she shunned the face she sought before.  
5        "How am I changed! alas! how am I grown  
A frightful specter, to myself unknown!  
Where's my complexion? where the radiant bloom,<sup>o</sup>  
That promised happiness for years to come?  
Then with what pleasure I this face surveyed!  
To look once more, my visits oft delayed!  
10        Charmed with the view, a fresher red would rise,  
And a new life shot sparkling from my eyes!  
      Ah! faithless glass, my wonted bloom restore;  
Alas! I rave, that bloom is now no more!  
The greatest good the gods on men bestow,  
15        Ev'n youth itself, to me is useless now.  
There was a time (oh! that I could forget!)  
When opera-tickets poured before my feet;  
And at the Ring,<sup>3</sup> where brightest beauties shine,  
The earliest cherries of the spring were mine.  
20        Witness, O Lilly; and thou, Motteux, tell  
How much Japan<sup>4</sup> these eyes have made ye sell.  
With what contempt ye saw me oft despise  
The humble offer of the raffled prize;  
For at the raffle still each prize I bore,  
25        With scorn rejected, or with triumph wore!  
Now beauty's fled, and presents are no more!<sup>5</sup>  
      For me the patriot has the House<sup>o</sup> forsook,

And left debates to catch a passing look:  
For me the soldier has soft verses writ;  
30 For me the beau has aimed to be a wit.  
For me the wit to nonsense was betrayed;  
The gamester<sup>o</sup> has for me his dun<sup>6</sup> delayed,  
And overseen<sup>o</sup> the card I would have played.  
The bold and haughty by success made vain,  
35 Awed by my eyes has trembled to complain:  
The bashful 'squire touched by a wish unknown,  
Has dared to speak with spirit not his own;  
Fired by one wish, all did alike adore;  
Now beauty's fled, and lovers are no more!  
40 As round the room I turn my weeping eyes,  
New unaffected scenes of sorrow rise!  
Far from my sight that killing<sup>o</sup> picture bear,  
The face disfigure, and the canvas tear!  
That picture which with pride I used to show,  
45 The lost resemblance but upbraids me now.  
And thou, my toilette! where I oft have sat,  
While hours unheeded passed in deep debate,  
How curls should fall, or where a patch<sup>z</sup> to place:  
If blue or scarlet best became my face;  
50 Now on some happier nymph thy aid bestow;  
On fairer heads, ye useless jewels glow!  
No borrowed luster can my charms restore;  
Beauty is fled, and dress is now no more!  
Ye meaner<sup>o</sup> beauties, I permit ye shine;  
55 Go, triumph in the hearts that once were mine;  
But midst your triumphs with confusion know,  
'Tis to my ruin all your arms<sup>8</sup> ye owe.  
Would pitying heaven restore my wonted mien,  
Ye still might move unthought-of and unseen.  
60 But oh! how vain, how wretched is the boast  
Of beauty faded, and of empire lost!  
What now is left but weeping, to deplore

My beauty fled, and empire now no more!  
 Ye, cruel chemists,<sup>o</sup> what withheld your aid!  
 65 Could no pomatums<sup>o</sup> save a trembling maid?  
 How false and trifling is that art<sup>o</sup> you boast;  
 No art can give me back my beauty lost.  
 In tears, surrounded by my friends I lay,  
 Masked o'er and trembled at the sight of day;  
 70 Mirmillo<sup>9</sup> came my fortune to deplore,  
 (A golden-headed cane, well-carved he bore)  
 Cordials,<sup>o</sup> he cried, my spirits must restore:  
 Beauty is fled, and spirit is no more!  
 Galen, the grave; officious Squirt<sup>1</sup> was there,  
 75 With fruitless grief and unavailing care:  
 Machaon<sup>2</sup> too, the great Machaon, known  
 By his red cloak and his superior frown;  
 And why, he cried, this grief and this despair?  
 You shall again be well, again be fair;  
 80 Believe my oath; (with that an oath he swore)  
 False was his oath; my beauty is no more!  
 Cease, hapless maid, no more thy tale pursue,  
 Forsake mankind, and bid the world adieu!  
 Monarchs and beauties rule with equal sway;  
 85 All strive to serve, and glory to obey:  
 Alike unpitied when deposed they grow;  
 Men mock the idol of their former vow.  
 Adieu! ye parks!—in some obscure recess,  
 Where gentle streams will weep at my distress,  
 90 Where no false friend will in my grief take part,  
 And mourn my ruin with a joyful heart;  
 There let me live in some deserted place,  
 There hide in shades this lost inglorious face.  
 Ye, operas, circles,<sup>3</sup> I no more must view!  
 95 My toilette, patches, all the world adieu!"

- Note 1:

A deadly disease, smallpox was also deplored for the scars it left on hitherto beautiful complexions. Montagu's brother died of it, and she herself nearly did. Her family members said she wrote this poem just after she recovered from the illness in 1715, at age twenty-six (though she would publish it decades later). The following year, she traveled with her husband to Turkey, where she would learn about and embrace inoculation against smallpox as practiced there. The title of the book in which this poem first appeared, *Six Town Eclogues, with Some Other Poems*, published in 1747, ironically alludes to the *Eclogues* (ca. 38–39 B.C.E.) of Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.), pastoral poems peopled with fancifully elegant shepherds and shepherdesses in the countryside: Montagu's eclogues, each titled after a day of the week (Monday through Saturday), treat modern, urban figures with problems common in the "town," the fashionable part of London.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The name means "blonde." Each of Montagu's eclogues is devoted to a speech of a single figure, as here, or to a pair of characters in dialogue. (All were women except Tuesday's amorous male dialogists.)[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fashionable drive in Hyde Park.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lacquerware made in Japan, or imitations made elsewhere. "Lilly": Charles Lillie (d. 1746), an innovative perfumer who also sold scented snuffs and other items at a shop in the Strand, and was a publisher of Addison and Steele's *Tatler* and *Spectator*, both of which mention him and his shop frequently. "Motteux": the Huguenot merchant and playwright Pierre Antoine Motteux (1663–1718) and, later, his widow, ran a shop that sold lacquerware in Leadenhall Street.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Montagu reworks Pope's changing refrain in his fourth pastoral, published in 1709: for example, "Fair Daphne's dead, and Love is now no more!"[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: What he is owed, his winnings.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: A beauty patch of black silk worn on the face.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Beauty portrayed as a martial weapon. The word *charms* appears in a manuscript copy.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The name of a character, representing Dr. William Gibbons (1649–1728), in the very popular mock-heroic poem *The Dispensary* (1699) by the wit Samuel Garth (1661–1719), who was also Montagu’s family physician. She repurposes the name here to refer to Dr. Richard Mead (1674–1754), who researched smallpox extensively and promoted inoculation, and was known for his “golden-headed cane” (line 72). With Garth, he treated Montagu during her 1715 smallpox illness.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A slang term for physician, and a character in *The Dispensary* (where he is also called “officious Squirt”). “Galen”: Aelius Galenus or Claudius Galenus (129–216 C.E.), Greek physician and surgeon in the Roman Empire, who exercised a dominant influence on western medicine; here he possibly represents Dr. John Woodward (1665/8–1728), who read a letter in favor of smallpox inoculation to the Royal Society in 1714, and also treated Montagu in 1715.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Son of the Greek god of medicine Asclepius, and so a nickname for physicians, as in *The Dispensary*, in which he represents Sir Thomas Millington (1628–1704); Montagu uses it here to refer to Garth himself, who wore a distinctive “red cloak” (line 78).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: “A company; an assembly” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *mirror*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *glow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *of Commons*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gambler*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *overlooked*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *devastatingly beautiful*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *lesser*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *apothecaries*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *ointments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *skill*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *medicinal alcohols*[Return to reference](#) °

## The Lover: A Ballad

At length, by so much importunity pressed,  
Take, (Molly),<sup>1</sup> at once, the inside of my breast;  
This stupid indifference so often you blame  
Is not owing to nature, to fear, or to shame;  
5 I am not as cold as a Virgin in lead.<sup>2</sup>  
Nor is Sunday's sermon so strong in my head;  
I know but too well how time flies along,  
That we live but few years and yet fewer are young.

But I hate to be cheated, and never will buy  
Long years of repentance for moments of joy.  
10 Oh was there a man (but where shall I find  
Good sense and good nature so equally joined?)  
Would value his pleasure, contribute to mine,  
Not meanly would boast, nor lewdly design,<sup>3</sup>  
Not over severe, yet not stupidly vain,  
15 For I would have the power though not give the  
pain;

No pedant yet learnèd, not rakehelly gay  
Or laughing because he has nothing to say,  
To all my whole sex obliging and free,  
Yet never be fond of any but me;  
20 In public preserve the decorums are just,  
And show in his eyes he is true to his trust,  
Then rarely approach, and respectfully bow,  
Yet not fulsomely pert, nor yet foppishly low.

But when the long hours of public are past  
25 And we meet with champagne and a chicken at last,  
May every fond pleasure that hour endear,



Be banished afar both discretion and fear,  
 Forgetting or scorning the airs of the crowd  
 He may cease to be formal, and I to be proud,  
 30 Till lost in the joy we confess that we live,  
 And he may be rude, and yet I may forgive.

And that my delight may be solidly fixed,  
 Let the friend and the lover be handsomely mixed,  
 In whose tender bosom my soul might confide,  
 35 Whose kindness can sooth me, whose counsel could  
 guide.  
 From such a dear lover as here I describe  
 No danger should fright me, no millions should  
 bribe;  
 But till this astonishing creature I know,  
 40 As I long have lived chaste, I will keep myself so.

I never will share with the wanton coquette,  
 Or be caught by a vain affectation of wit.  
 The toasters and songsters may try all their art  
 But never shall enter the pass of my heart.  
 45 I loathe the lewd rake, the dressed fopling despise;  
 Before such pursuers the nice<sup>o</sup> virgin flies;  
 And as Ovid has sweetly in parables told  
 We harden like trees, and like rivers are cold.<sup>3</sup>

## Endnotes

1747

- Note 1: Molly Skerrett, a friend of Lady Mary, was the mistress of Sir Robert Walpole. The ideal “lover” of the title, however, is not to be identified with any particular person. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, an image of the Virgin Mary, either as a leaden statue or as a stained-glass window framed in lead. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Daphne, to escape Apollo, was turned into a laurel, and Arethusa, escaping Alpheus, became a fountain. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *plot* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fastidious* [Return to reference °](#)

## Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband<sup>1</sup>

Think not this paper comes with vain pretense  
To move your pity, or to mourn th' offense.  
Too well I know that hard obdurate heart;  
No softening mercy there will take my part,  
Nor can a woman's arguments prevail,  
5 When even your patron's wise example fails.<sup>2</sup>  
But this last privilege I still retain;  
Th' oppressed and injured always may complain.  
Too, too severely laws of honor bind  
The weak submissive sex of womankind.  
10 If sighs have gained or force compelled our hand,  
Deceived by art, or urged by stern command,  
Whatever motive binds the fatal tie,  
The judging world expects our constancy.  
Just heaven! (for sure in heaven does justice  
15 reign,  
Though tricks below that sacred name profane)  
To you appealing I submit my cause,  
Nor fear a judgment from impartial laws.  
All bargains but conditional<sup>o</sup> are made;  
The purchase void, the creditor unpaid;  
20 Defrauded servants are from service free;  
A wounded slave regains his liberty.  
For wives ill used no remedy remains,  
To daily racks condemned, and to eternal chains.  
From whence is this unjust distinction grown?  
25 Are we not formed with passions like your own?  
Nature with equal fire our souls endued,  
Our minds as haughty, and as warm our blood;  
O'er the wide world your pleasures you pursue,

30 The change is justified by something new;  
 But we must sigh in silence—and be true. }  
 Our sex's weakness you expose and blame  
 (Of every prattling fop the common theme),  
 Yet from this weakness you suppose is due  
 35 Sublimer virtue than your Cato<sup>3</sup> knew.  
 Had heaven designed us trials so severe,  
 It would have formed our tempers them to bear.  
 And I have borne (oh what have I not borne!)  
 The pang of jealousy, the insults of scorn.  
 Wearied at length, I from your sight remove,  
 40 And place my future hopes in secret love.  
 In the gay bloom of glowing youth retired,  
 I quit the woman's joy to be admired,  
 With that small pension your hard heart allows,  
 Renounce your fortune, and release your vows.  
 45 To custom (though unjust) so much is due;  
 I hide my frailty from the public view.  
 My conscience clear, yet sensible of shame,  
 My life I hazard, to preserve my fame.  
 And I prefer this low inglorious state  
 50 To vile dependence on the thing I hate— }  
 But you pursue me to this last retreat.  
 Dragged into light, my tender crime is shown  
 And every circumstance of fondness known.  
 Beneath the shelter of the law you stand,  
 55 And urge my ruin with a cruel hand,  
 While to my fault thus rigidly severe,  
 Tamely submissive to the man you fear.<sup>4</sup>  
 This wretched outcast, this abandoned wife,  
 Has yet this joy to sweeten shameful life:  
 60 By your mean conduct, infamously loose,  
 You are at once my accuser and excuse.  
 Let me be damned by the censorious prude  
 (Stupidly dull, or spiritually lewd),

65 My hapless case will surely pity find  
 From every just and reasonable mind.  
 When to the final sentence I submit,  
 The lips condemn me, but their souls acquit.  
 No more my husband, to your pleasures go,  
 The sweets of your recovered freedom know.  
 70 Go: court the brittle friendship of the great,  
 Smile at his board,<sup>o</sup> or at his levee<sup>5</sup> wait;  
 And when dismissed, to madam's toilet<sup>6</sup> fly,  
 More than her chambermaids, or glasses,<sup>o</sup> lie,  
 Tell her how young she looks, how heavenly fair,  
 75 Admire the lilies and the roses there.  
 Your high ambition may be gratified,  
 Some cousin of her own be made your bride,  
 And you the father of a glorious race  
 Endowed with Ch—l's strength and Low—r's face.<sup>7</sup>  
 80

## 1724 **Endnotes**

1972

- Note 1: In 1724 the notorious libertine William Yonge, separated from his wife, Mary, discovered that she (like him) had committed adultery. He sued her lover, Colonel Norton, for damages and collected £1500. Later that year, according to the law of the time, he petitioned the Houses of Parliament for a divorce. The case was tried in public, Mary Yonge's love letters were read aloud, and two men testified that they had found her and Norton "together in naked bed." William Yonge was granted the divorce, his wife's dowry, and the greater part of her fortune.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Sir Robert Walpole, William Yonge's friend at court, was rumored to tolerate his own wife's infidelities.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The asceticism and self-discipline of the Roman statesman Cato were emphasized in Addison's famous tragedy *Cato* (1713).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: That is, Walpole. Montagu suggests that the whole political establishment of England takes sides against Mary Yonge.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Morning reception of visitors.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: It was fashionable for women like Lady Walpole to receive visitors during the last stages of dressing (their “toilet”).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: General Churchill was rumored to have had an affair with Lady Walpole. Antony Lowther was a notorious gallant. The author implies that William Yonge’s next wife may be as untrue as his first. Mary Yonge remarried immediately after her divorce; five years later William Yonge himself (whose divorce had made him rich) married the daughter of a baron.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *only conditionally*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dining table*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mirrors*[Return to reference °](#)

# ***From Letters . . . Written during Her Travels [The Turkish Embassy Letters]***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

***Letter XXVI, To Lady —, Adrianople,***<sup>[2](#)</sup> ***1 April 1717***

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The complete title runs, *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M—W— y M— e: written, during her travels in Europe, Asia and Africa, to persons of distinction, Men of Letters, &c. in different parts of Europe, which contain, among other curious relations, Accounts of the Policy and Manners of the Turks; Drawn from Sources that have been inaccessible to other Travellers.*[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A city in western Turkey, named after the Roman emperor Hadrian and now called Edirne.[Return to reference 2](#)

**["THE WOMEN'S COFFEE HOUSE"; OR, THE TURKISH BATHS]**

I am now got into a new world, where every thing I see appears to me a change of scene; and I write to your ladyship with some content of mind, hoping, at least, that you will find the charm of novelty in my letters, and no longer reproach me that I tell you nothing extraordinary. I won't trouble you with a relation of our tedious journey; but I must not omit what I saw remarkable at Sophia,<sup>3</sup> one of the most beautiful towns in the Turkish empire and famous for its hot baths, that are resorted to both for diversion and health. I stopped here one day on purpose to see them; and designing to go *incognito*, I hired a Turkish coach. These voitures<sup>4</sup> are not at all like ours, but much more convenient for the country, the heat being so great that glasses<sup>5</sup> would be very troublesome. They are made a good deal in the manner of the Dutch coaches, having wooden lattices painted and gilded; the inside being painted with baskets and nosegays of flowers, intermixed commonly with little poetical mottos. They are covered all over with scarlet cloth, lined with silk, and very often richly embroidered and fringed. This covering entirely hides the persons in them, but may be thrown back at pleasure, and thus permit the ladies to peep through the lattices. They hold four people very conveniently, seated on cushions, but not raised.





Unknown artist, ***Mary Wortley Montagu in the Turkish Bath***, 1781. The scene in Montagu's *Letters* that most fascinated her European readers: the visit to the Turkish baths. From the frontispiece of *Letters . . . written, during her travels in Europe, Asia and Africa, to persons of distinction, Men of Letters, &c. . . . which contain . . . Accounts of the Policy and Manners of the Turks* (Berlin, 1781).

---

In one of these covered wagons, I went to the bagnio<sup>6</sup> about ten o'clock. It was already full of women. It is built of stone, in the shape of a dome, with no windows but in the roof, which gives light enough. There were five of these domes joined together, the outmost being less<sup>7</sup> than the rest, and serving only as a hall, where the portress stood at the door. Ladies of quality generally give this woman the value of a crown or ten shillings, and I did not forget that ceremony. The next room is a very large one, paved with marble, and all round it raised two sofas of marble, one above another. There were four fountains of cold water in this room, falling first into marble basins, and then running on the floor in little channels made for that purpose, which carried the streams into the next room, something less than this, with the same sort of marble sofas, but so hot with steams of sulphur proceeding from the baths joining to it, 'twas impossible to stay there with one's clothes on. The two other domes were the hot baths, one of which had cocks<sup>8</sup> of cold water turning into it, to temper it to what degree of warmth the bathers pleased to have.

I was in my traveling habit, which is a riding dress, and certainly appeared very extraordinary to them. Yet there was not one of them that showed the least surprise or impertinent curiosity, but received me with all the obliging civility possible. I know no European court where the ladies would have behaved themselves in so polite a manner to such a stranger. I believe, upon the whole, there were two hundred women, and yet none of those disdainful smiles or satirical whispers that never fail in our assemblies when anybody appears that is not dressed exactly in fashion. They repeated over

and over to me, "Uzelle, pek uzelle," which is nothing but "charming, very charming."—The first sofas were covered with cushions and rich carpets, on which sat the ladies; and on the second, their slaves behind them, but without any distinction of rank by their dress, all being in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked, without any beauty or defect concealed. Yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst them. They walked and moved with the same majestic grace which Milton describes our General Mother<sup>9</sup> with. There were many amongst them as exactly proportioned as ever any goddess was drawn by the pencil of Guido or Titian,<sup>1</sup> and most of their skins shinningly white, only adorned by their beautiful hair, divided into many tresses hanging on their shoulders, braided either with pearl or ribbon, perfectly representing the figures of the graces.<sup>2</sup>

I was here convinced of the truth of a reflection I had often made, that if it were the fashion to go naked, the face would be hardly observed. I perceived that the ladies of the most delicate skins and finest shapes had the greatest share of my admiration, though their faces were sometimes less beautiful than those of their companions. To tell you the truth, I had wickedness enough to wish secretly that Mr. Gervase<sup>3</sup> could have been there invisible. I fancy it would have very much improved his art to see so many fine women naked in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their cushions while their slaves (generally pretty girls of seventeen or eighteen) were employed in braiding their hair in several pretty fancies. In short, 'tis the women's coffee house, where all the news of the town is told, scandal invented, etc. They generally take this diversion once a week, and stay there at least four or five hours without getting cold, by immediate coming out of the hot bath into the cool room, which was very surprising to me. The lady that seemed the most considerable amongst them entreated me to sit by her, and would fain have undressed me for the bath. I excused myself with some difficulty. They being however all so earnest in persuading me, I was at last forced to open my skirt and show them

my stays,<sup>4</sup> which satisfied them very well, for I saw they believed I was locked up in that machine, and that it was not in my own power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my husband. I was charmed with their civility and beauty and should have been very glad to pass more time with them, but Mr. W[ortley] resolving to pursue his journey the next morning early, I was in haste to see the ruins of Justinian's church,<sup>5</sup> which did not afford me so agreeable a prospect as I had left, being little more than a heap of stones.

Adieu, Madam. I am sure I have now entertained you with an account of such a sight as you never saw in your life, and what no book of travels could inform you of, as 'tis no less than death for a man to be found in one of these places.

***Letter XXX, To Mr. [Alexander] Pope, Adrianople, 1 April  
1717***

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Sofia, now the capital of Bulgaria.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Carriages.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Windowpanes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Bathhouse.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Smaller.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Faucets.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Eve. See *Paradise Lost* 4.492 and 8.42–43.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Italian painter (ca. 1488–1576). Guido Reni, Italian painter (1575–1642). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Three goddesses, daughters of Zeus, personifying grace and beauty.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Charles Jervas (1675–1739), English portrait painter, friend of Montagu, Pope, and Swift.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Corset stiffened with strips of whalebone.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Roman emperor Justinian (483–565) built St. Sofia Church in the middle of the 6th century.[Return to reference 5](#)

### [READING POETRY IN TURKEY]

I dare say you expect, at least, something very new in this letter, after I have gone a journey, not undertaken, by any Christian, for some hundred years. The most remarkable accident that happened to me was my being very near over-turned into the Hebrus;<sup>6</sup> and, if I had much regard for the glories that one's name enjoys after death, I should certainly be sorry for having missed the romantic conclusion of swimming down the same river in which the musical head of Orpheus repeated verses, so many ages since:

*Caput a cervice revulsum,  
Gurgite cum medio, portans Oeagrius Hebrus  
Volveret, Euridicen vox ipsa, et frigida lingua  
Ah! miseram Euridicen! anima fugiente vocabat,  
Euridicen toto referebant flumine ripæ.*<sup>7</sup>

Who knows but some of your bright wits might have found it a subject affording many poetical turns, and have told the world, in an heroic elegy, that,

*As equal were our souls, so equal were our fates?*<sup>8</sup>

I despair of ever hearing so many fine things said of me, as so extraordinary a death would have given occasion for.

I am at this present moment writing in a house situated on the banks of the Hebrus, which runs under my chamber window. My garden is full of tall cypress trees, upon the branches of which several couple of true turtles are saying soft things to one another from morning till night. How naturally do *boughs* and *vows* come into my mind, at this minute? And must not you confess, to my praise, that 'tis more than an ordinary discretion, that can resist the wicked suggestions of poetry, in a place where truth, for once, furnishes all the ideas of pastoral.<sup>9</sup> The summer is already far

advanced, in this part of the world; and for some miles round Adrianople, the whole ground is laid out in gardens, and the banks of the rivers are set with rows of fruit trees, under which all the most considerable Turks divert themselves every evening, not with walking, that is not one of their pleasures; but a set party of them choose out a green spot, where the shade is very thick, and there they spread a carpet, on which they sit drinking their coffee, and are generally attended by some slave with a fine voice, or that plays on some instrument. Every twenty paces you may see one of these little companies, listening to the dashing of the river; and this taste is so universal that the very gardeners are not without it. I have often seen them and their children sitting on the banks of the river, and playing on a rural instrument, perfectly answering the description of the ancient *fistula*,<sup>1</sup> being composed of unequal reeds, with a simple but agreeable softness in the sound.

Mr. Addison might here make the experiment he speaks of in his travels; there not being one instrument of music among the Greek or Roman statues, that is not to be found in the hands of the people of this country.<sup>2</sup> The young lads generally divert themselves with making garlands for their favorite lambs, which I have often seen painted and adorned with flowers, lying at their feet, while they sung or played. It is not that they ever read romances. But these are the ancient amusements here, and as natural to them as cudgel-playing and football to our British swains;<sup>3</sup> the softness and warmth of the climate forbidding all rough exercises, which were never so much as heard of amongst them, and naturally inspiring a laziness and aversion to labor, which the great plenty indulges. These gardeners are the only happy race of country people in Turkey. They furnish all the city with fruits and herbs, and seem to live very easily. They are most of them Greeks, and have little houses in the midst of their gardens, where their wives and daughters take a liberty not permitted in the town, I mean to go unveiled. These wenches are very neat and handsome, and pass their time at their looms under the shade of the trees.



I no longer look upon Theocritus as a romantic writer;<sup>4</sup> he has only given a plain image of the way of life amongst the peasants of his country; who, before oppression had reduced them to want, were, I suppose, all employed as the better sort of them are now. I don't doubt, had he been born a Briton, but his *Idylliums* had been filled with descriptions of threshing and churning, both which are unknown here, the corn being all trod out by oxen; and butter (I speak it with sorrow) unheard of.

I read over your *Homer*<sup>5</sup> here, with an infinite pleasure, and find several little passages explained, that I did not before entirely comprehend the beauty of: many of the customs, and much of the dress then in fashion, being yet retained. I don't wonder to find more remains here of an age so distant, than is to be found in any other country, the Turks not taking that pains to introduce their own manners, as has been generally practiced by other nations that imagine themselves more polite. It would be too tedious to you to point out all the passages that relate to present customs. But I can assure you that the princesses and great ladies pass their time at their looms, embroidering veils and robes, surrounded by their maids, which are always very numerous, in the same manner as we find Andromache and Helen described. The description of the belt of Menelaus exactly resembles those that are now worn by the great men, fastened before with broad golden clasps, and embroidered round with rich work. The snowy veil that Helen throws over her face is still fashionable; and I never see half a dozen of old bashaws<sup>6</sup> (as I do very often) with their reverend beards, sitting basking in the sun, but I recollect good King Priam and his counsellors. Their manner of dancing is certainly the same that Diana is sung to have danced on the banks of Eurotas.<sup>7</sup> The great lady still leads the dance, and is followed by a troop of young girls, who imitate her steps, and, if she sings, make up the chorus. The tunes are extremely gay and lively, yet with something in them wonderfully soft. The steps are varied according to the pleasure of her that leads the dance, but always in exact time, and infinitely more agreeable than any of our dances, at least in my opinion. I sometimes make



one in the train, but am not skillful enough to lead; these are the Grecian dances, the Turkish being very different.

I should have told you, in the first place, that the Eastern manners give a great light into many Scripture-passages that appear odd to us, their phrases being commonly what we should call Scripture-language. The vulgar Turk is very different from what is spoke at court, or amongst the people of figure; who always mix so much Arabic and Persian in their discourse that it may very well be called another language. And 'tis as ridiculous to make use of the expressions commonly used, in speaking to a great man or lady, as it would be to speak broad Yorkshire or Somersetshire in the drawing-room. Besides this distinction, they have what they call the *sublime*, that is, a style proper for poetry, and which is the exact Scripture style. I believe you will be pleased to see a genuine example of this; and I am very glad I have it in my power to satisfy your curiosity, by sending you a faithful copy of the verses that Ibrahim Bassa,<sup>8</sup> the reigning favorite, has made for the young princess, his contracted wife, whom he is not yet permitted to visit without witnesses, though she is gone home to his house. He is a man of wit and learning; and whether or no he is capable of writing good verse, you may be sure that, on such an occasion, he would not want the assistance of the best poets in the empire. Thus the verses may be looked upon as a sample of their finest poetry, and I don't doubt you'll be of my mind, that it is most wonderfully resembling *The Song of Solomon*, which was also addressed to a royal bride.<sup>9</sup>

***Turkish Verses Addressed to the Sultana, Eldest Daughter of Sultan Achmet III***

**1**

The nightingale now wanders in the vines;  
Her passion is to seek roses.

I went down to admire the beauty of the vines;

The sweetness of your charms has ravished my soul.

Your eyes are black and lovely  
But wild and disdainful as those of a stag;

## 2

The wished possession is delayed from day to day,  
The cruel Sultan Achmet will not permit me  
To see those cheeks, more vermilion than roses.

I dare not snatch one of your kisses,  
The sweetness of your charms has ravished my soul.

Your eyes are black and lovely,  
But wild and disdainful as those of a stag.

## 3

The wretched Ibrahim sighs in these verses,  
One dart from your eyes has pierced thro' my heart.

Ah! when will the hour of possession arrive?  
Must I yet wait a long time?  
The sweetness of your charms has ravished my soul.

Ah! Sultana! stag-eyed—an angel amongst angels!  
I desire,—and my desire remains unsatisfied.  
Can you take delight to prey upon my heart?

## 4

My cries pierce the heavens!  
My eyes are without sleep!  
Turn to me, Sultana—let me gaze on thy beauty.

Adieu—I go down to the grave.  
If you call me—I return.  
My heart is—hot as sulphur;—sigh, and it will flame.

Crown of my life, fair light of my eyes!  
My Sultana! my princess!  
I rub my face against the earth; I am drowned in  
scalding tears—I rave!  
Have you no compassion? Will you not turn to look  
upon me?

I have taken abundance of pains to get these verses in a literal translation; and if you were acquainted with my interpreters, I might spare myself the trouble of assuring you, that they have received no poetical touches from their hands. In my opinion (allowing for the inevitable faults of a prose translation into a language so very different) there is a good deal of beauty in them. The epithet of *stag-eyed* (though the sound is not very agreeable in English) pleases me extremely; and I think it a very lively image of the fire and indifference in his mistress's eyes. Monsieur Boileau<sup>1</sup> has very justly observed, that we are never to judge of the elevation of an expression in an ancient author, by the sound it carries with us; since it may be extremely fine with them, when, at the same time, it appears low or uncouth to us. You are so well acquainted with Homer, you cannot but have observed the same thing, and you must have the same indulgence for all oriental<sup>2</sup> poetry. The repetitions at the end of the two first stanzas are meant for a sort of chorus, and are agreeable to the ancient manner of writing. The music of the verses apparently changes in the third stanza, where the burden<sup>3</sup> is altered; and I think he very artfully seems more passionate at the conclusion, as 'tis natural for people to warm themselves by their own discourse, especially on a subject in which one is deeply concerned; 'tis certainly far more touching than our modern custom of concluding a song of passion, with a turn which is inconsistent with it. The first verse is a description of the season of the year; all the country now being full of nightingales, whose amours with roses

is an Arabian fable, as well known here as any part of Ovid amongst us, and is much the same as if an English poem should begin by saying,—‘Now Philomela<sup>4</sup> sings.’ Or what if I turned the whole into the style of English poetry, to see how it would look?

## 1

Now Philomel renews her tender strain.  
Indulging all the night her pleasing pain;

I sought the groves to hear the wanton sing,  
There saw a face, more beauteous than the spring,

Your large stag-eyes where thousand glories play,  
As bright, as lively, but as wild as they.

## 2

In vain I’m promised such a heavenly prize,  
Ah! cruel Sultan! who delay’st my joys!

While piercing charms transfix my amorous heart,  
I dare not snatch one kiss, to ease the smart.

Those eyes! like, etc.

## 3

Your wretched lover in these lines complains;  
From those dear beauties rise his killing pains.

When will the hour of wished-for bliss arrive?  
Must I wait longer?—Can I wait and live?

Ah! bright Sultana! Maid divinely fair!  
Can you, unpitying, see the pains I bear?

The heavens relenting, hear my piercing cries,  
 I loathe the light, and sleep forsakes my eyes,  
 Turn thee Sultana, 'ere thy lover dies;

Sinking to earth, I sigh the last adieu,  
 Call me, my goddess, and my life renew.

My queen! My angel! My fond heart's desire.  
 I rave—my bosom burns with heavenly fire!  
 Pity that passion, which thy charms inspire.

I have taken the liberty in the second verse, of following what I suppose the true sense of the author, though not literally expressed. By his saying, *he went down to admire the beauty of the vines, and her charms ravished his soul*, I understand a poetical fiction, of having first seen her in a garden, where he was admiring the beauty of the spring. But I could not forbear retaining the comparison of her eyes with those of a stag, though perhaps the novelty of it may give it a burlesque sound in our language. I cannot determine, upon the whole, how well I have succeeded in the translation, neither do I think our English proper to express such violence of passion, which is very seldom felt amongst us. We want also those compound words which are very frequent and strong in the Turkish language.

You see I am pretty far gone in Oriental learning, and to say truth, I study very hard. I wish my studies may give me an occasion of entertaining your curiosity, which will be the utmost advantage hoped for from them, by,

Yours, etc.

1717

1763

***Letter XXXI, To Mrs. S. C. [Sarah Chiswell],  
 Adrianople, 1 April 1717***

## Endnotes

- Note 6: A river, now called the Maritsa. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Virgil, *Georgics* 4. 523–26. In the myth, the musician Orpheus, searching for his lost love Eurydice, is ripped to pieces by Thracian women, and his head thrown into the river. In Dryden's influential translation: "Then, when his head, from his fair shoulders torn, / Washed by the waters, was on Hebrus born; / Even then his trembling tongue invoked his bride; / With his last voice, *Eurydice*, he cried, / *Eurydice*, the rocks and riverbanks replied" (761–65). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: She repurposes a line from Dryden's elegy "To the Pious Memory of the Accomplished Young Lady Mrs. Anne Killigrew" (1685). [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ancient poetic genre, often depicting the idyllic lives of shepherds. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An ancient reed instrument associated with pastoral. Montagu repeatedly links modern Turkey with the classical past. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Joseph Addison discussed ancient musical instruments in his *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Rural boys in Britain play rougher, less bucolic sports, including play-fighting with cudgels (or clubs). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Theocritus was an ancient Greek pastoral poet, author of a collection of *Idylls* (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E.). Montagu counters the period discourse on pastoral that emphasizes its idealizations. As Pope put it in "A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry," "pastoral is an image of what they call the Golden age. So that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceived then to have been." [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The first two volumes of Pope's English translation of Homer's ancient Greek *Iliad* had been published in 1715 and

1716, respectively.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: A form of “pasha,” a Turkish title indicating high rank.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Montagu draws a number of parallels between ancient descriptions in the *Iliad* and contemporary Turkish culture. “Andromache”: a warrior’s wife, depicted at her loom in Homer’s poem at 22.437–49. “Helen”: a beautiful woman, weaving at 3.125–28 and wearing a veil at 3.141. “Belt of Menelaus”: this garment of Helen’s royal husband is described at 4.132–39. “King Priam and his counsellors”: key characters, gathered together for instance at 3.145–53. “Diana”: perhaps a reference to Virgil’s *Aeneid* 1.498–502, which has Diana dancing on Eurotas.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Nevsehirli Ibrahim Pasha, who later in 1717 did marry sultan Ahmed III’s daughter and became Grand Vizier.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Also called Song of Songs, a book in the Christian Bible’s Old Testament.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: French literary critic Nicolas Boileau, in his *Réflexions critiques sur quelques passages du rhéteur Longin* (*Critical Reflections on Several Passages of the Orator Longinus*; 1694).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Eastern.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The refrain of a song or poem.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Latinate poetic term for a nightingale, often with an allusion to the Ovidian story of the human woman Philomela metamorphosized into a bird.[Return to reference 4](#)

## [THE TURKISH METHOD OF INOCULATION FOR THE SMALL POX]

\* \* \*

Apropos of distempers,<sup>5</sup> I am going to tell you a thing that will make you wish yourself here. The small pox, so fatal and so general amongst us, is here entirely harmless by the invention of engrafting, which is the term they give it. There is a set of old women who make it their business to perform the operation, every autumn, in the month of September, when the great heat is abated. People send to one another to know if any of their family has a mind to have the small pox; they make parties for this purpose, and when they are met (commonly fifteen or sixteen together) the old woman comes with a nutshell full of the matter of the best sort of small pox,<sup>6</sup> and asks what veins you please to have opened. She immediately rips open that you offer to her, with a large needle (which gives you no more pain than a common scratch) and puts into the vein as much matter as can lie upon the head of her needle, and after that, binds up the little wound with a hollow bit of shell, and in this manner opens four or five veins. The Grecians have commonly the superstition of opening one in the middle of the forehead, one in each arm, and one on the breast to mark the sign of the cross; but this has a very ill effect, all these wounds leaving little scars, and is not done by those that are not superstitious, who choose to have them in the legs, or that part of the arm that is concealed. The children or young patients play together all the rest of the day and are in perfect health to the eighth. Then the fever begins to seize them, and they keep their beds two days, very seldom three. They have very rarely above twenty or thirty in their faces, which never mark, and in eight days' time they are as well as before their illness. Where they are wounded, there remains running sores during the distemper, which I don't doubt is a great relief to it. Every year thousands undergo this operation, and the French ambassador says pleasantly that they take the small pox here by way of diversion, as they take the waters in other countries. There is no example of



anyone that has died in it, and you may believe I am very well satisfied of the safety of this experiment, since I intend to try it on my dear little son. I am patriot enough to take pains to bring this useful invention into fashion in England, and I should not fail to write to some of our doctors very particularly about it, if I knew any one of them that I thought had virtue enough to destroy such a considerable branch of their revenue, for the good of mankind. But that distemper is too beneficial to them, not to expose to all their resentment the hardy wight<sup>7</sup> that should undertake to put an end to it. Perhaps if I live to return, I may, however, have courage to war with them. Upon this occasion, admire the heroism in the heart of your friend, etc.

## 1717 **Endnotes**

1763

- Note 5: Montagu has just described a mild outbreak of the plague in the area. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In inoculation or variolation, the milder form of the smallpox virus (*Variola minor*) is introduced to the skin of a healthy person; the localized nature of this infection stimulates the immune system in time for the body both to terminate it and to protect itself against the virus in the future. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Person (archaic), often implying misfortune. [Return to reference 7](#)

## ELIZA HAYWOOD

### 1693?–1756

Not much is known about the early life of Elizabeth Fowler or about the “unfortunate marriage,” as she described it, that made her Eliza Haywood. She first came before the public as an actress in 1714 in Dublin, then moved to London. But “the stage not answering my expectation,” as she later confessed, soon “made me turn my genius another way,” to the life of a professional writer. Her first novel, the racy, best-selling *Love in Excess; or, The Fatal Inquiry* (1719), launched her long career as one of the most popular, prolific, and versatile authors of her time. She retailed gossip and also was gossiped about, becoming involved with the poet Richard Savage—a friend of Pope and later of Samuel Johnson—and with William Hatchett, a playwright and actor who seems to have been her longtime companion. Pope mocked her scandal mongering, and her two illegitimate children, in his own scandal-mongering *The Dunciad* (1728), and Fielding caricatured her as “Mrs. Novel.” But nothing could keep her from writing. In addition to many kinds of fiction, she produced poems, translations, plays, political satires, essays, criticism, and books of advice and conduct—whatever might sell. In the 1730s she returned to the stage, as a playwright and actress, until the government cracked down on the theater in 1737. From 1744 to 1746 she had another great success with the *Female Spectator*, a wide-ranging periodical written for women. Later, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), the story of an indiscreet

charmer who eventually reforms and finds her Mr. Trueworth, proved how well Haywood could adjust to the new style of edifying novels. And right up to the moment of her death she continued to work.

*Fantomina* first appeared among Haywood's *Secret Histories, Novels, and Poems* (1725), and the title page calls it "A Secret History of an Amour between Two Persons of Condition." The popular genre of "secret histories" promised a peep at what went on behind the scenes of fashionable society; and even though Haywood's story is obviously made up, it suggests that private lives, and especially love lives, are very different from what the public sees. Right at the start, the aristocratic heroine (whose name we never learn) is fascinated by the dalliance between "respectable" gentlemen and loose women of the town. She soon becomes a player herself. Cleverly switching roles, she gratifies her own desire by exploiting her lover's fickle passions. The story unsettles conventional views of social position, identity, morality, and gender. But most of all it shows that love is not only an irresistible impulse but also a risky, exciting game.

## Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze

*In love the victors from the vanquished fly.  
They fly that wound, and they pursue that die.*  
—Waller<sup>1</sup>

A young lady of distinguished birth, beauty, wit, and spirit, happened to be in a box one night at the playhouse; where, though there were a great number of celebrated toasts,<sup>2</sup> she perceived several gentlemen extremely pleased themselves with entertaining a woman who sat in a corner of the pit and, by her air and manner of receiving them, might easily be known to be one of those who come there for no other purpose, than to create acquaintance with as many as seem desirous of it. She could not help testifying her contempt of men who, regardless either of the play or circle, threw away their time in such a manner, to some ladies that sat by her. But they, either less surprised by being more accustomed to such sights than she who had been bred for the most part in the country, or not of a disposition to consider anything very deeply, took but little notice of it. She still thought of it, however; and the longer she reflected on it, the greater was her wonder that men, some of whom she knew were accounted to have wit, should have tastes so very depraved.—This excited a curiosity in her to know in what manner these creatures were addressed.—She was young, a stranger to the world, and consequently to the dangers of it; and having nobody in town, at that time, to whom she was obliged to be accountable for her actions, did in everything as her inclinations or humors rendered most agreeable to her: therefore thought it not in the least a fault to put in practice a little whim which came immediately into her head, to dress herself as near as she could in the fashion of those women who make sale of their favors, and set herself in the way of being accosted as such a one, having at that time no other aim than the gratification of an innocent curiosity.—She no sooner designed this

frolic than she put it in execution; and muffling her hoods over her face, went the next night into the gallery-box, and practicing, as much as she had observed at that distance, the behavior of that woman, was not long before she found her disguise had answered the ends she wore it for.—A crowd of purchasers of all degrees and capacities were in a moment gathered about her, each endeavoring to outbid the other, in offering her a price for her embraces.—She listened to 'em all, and was not a little diverted in her mind at the disappointment she should give to so many, each of which thought himself secure of gaining her.—She was told by 'em all, that she was the most lovely woman in the world; and some cried, *Gad, she is mighty like my fine Lady Such-a-one*—naming her own name. She was naturally vain, and received no small pleasure in hearing herself praised, though in the person of another, and a supposed prostitute; but she dispatched as soon as she could all that had hitherto attacked her, when she saw the accomplished *Beauplaisir*<sup>3</sup> was making his way through the crowd as fast as he was able, to reach the bench she sat on. She had often seen him in the drawing-room, had talked with him; but then her quality<sup>4</sup> and reputed virtue kept him from using her with that freedom she now expected he would do, and had discovered something in him which had made her often think she should not be displeased, if he would abate some part of his reserve.—Now was the time to have her wishes answered.—He looked in her face, and fancied, as many others had done, that she very much resembled that lady whom she really was; but the vast disparity there appeared between their characters prevented him from entertaining even the most distant thought that they could be the same.—He addressed her at first with the usual salutations of her pretended profession, as, *Are you engaged, Madam?—Will you permit me to wait on you home after the play?—By Heaven, you are a fine girl!—How long have you used this house?*—and such like questions; but perceiving she had a turn of wit, and a genteel manner in her raillery, beyond what is frequently to be found among those wretches, who are for the most part gentlewomen but by necessity, few of 'em having had an education suitable to what they

affect to appear, he changed the form of his conversation, and showed her it was not because he understood no better, that he had made use of expressions so little polite.—In fine, they were infinitely charmed with each other. He was transported to find so much beauty and wit in a woman who he doubted not but on very easy terms he might enjoy; and she found a vast deal of pleasure in conversing with him in this free and unrestrained manner. They passed their time all the play with an equal satisfaction; but when it was over, she found herself involved in a difficulty which before never entered into her head, but which she knew not well how to get over.—The passion he professed for her was not of that humble nature which can be content with distant adorations.—He resolved not to part from her without the gratifications of those desires she had inspired; and presuming on the liberties which her supposed function allowed of, told her she must either go with him to some convenient house of his procuring, or permit him to wait on her to her own lodgings.—Never had she been in such a *dilemma*. Three or four times did she open her mouth to confess her real quality; but the influence of her ill stars prevented it, by putting an excuse into her head which did the business as well, and at the same time did not take from her the power of seeing and entertaining him a second time with the same freedom she had done this.—She told him, she was under obligations to a man who maintained her, and whom she durst not disappoint, having promised to meet him that night at a house hard by.—This story, so like what those ladies sometimes tell, was not at all suspected, by *Beauplaisir*; and assuring her he would be far from doing her a prejudice,<sup>5</sup> desired that in return for the pain he should suffer in being deprived of her company that night, that she would order her affairs so as not to render him unhappy the next. She gave a solemn promise to be in the same box on the morrow evening, and they took leave of each other; he to the tavern to drown the remembrance of his disappointment; she in a hackney-chair<sup>6</sup> hurried home to indulge contemplation on the frolic she had taken, designing nothing less on her first reflections than to keep the promise she had made him, and

hugging herself with joy, that she had the good luck to come off undiscovered.

But these cogitations were but of a short continuance, they vanished with the hurry of her spirits, and were succeeded by others vastly different and ruinous.—All the charms of *Beauplaisir* came fresh into her mind; she languished, she almost died for another opportunity of conversing with him; and not all the admonitions of her discretion were effectual to oblige her to deny laying hold of that which offered itself the next night.—She depended on the strength of her virtue to bear her fate through trials more dangerous than she apprehended this to be, and never having been addressed by him as Lady—, was resolved to receive his devoirs as a town-mistress,<sup>7</sup> imagining a world of satisfaction to herself in engaging him in the character of such a one and in observing the surprise he would be in to find himself refused by a woman who he supposed granted her favors without exception.—Strange and unaccountable were the whimsies she was possessed of—wild and incoherent her desires—unfixed and undetermined her resolutions, but in that of seeing *Beauplaisir* in the manner she had lately done. As for her proceedings with him, or how a second time to escape him without discovering who she was, she could neither assure herself, nor whether or not in the last extremity she would do so.—Bent, however, on meeting him, whatever should be the consequence, she went out some hours before the time of going to the playhouse, and took lodgings in a house not very far from it, intending, that if he should insist on passing some part of the night with her, to carry him there, thinking she might with more security to her honor entertain him at a place where she was mistress than at any of his own choosing.

The appointed hour being arrived, she had the satisfaction to find his love in his assiduity. He was there before her; and nothing could be more tender than the manner in which he accosted her. But from the first moment she came in, to that of the play being done, he continued to assure her no consideration should prevail with him to part from her again, as she had done the night before; and she

rejoiced to think she had taken that precaution of providing herself with a lodging, to which she thought she might invite him without running any risk, either of her virtue or reputation.—Having told him she would admit of his accompanying her home, he seemed perfectly satisfied; and leading her to the place, which was not above twenty houses distant, would have ordered a collation to be brought after them. But she would not permit it, telling him she was not one of those who suffered themselves to be treated at their own lodgings; and as soon she was come in, sent a servant belonging to the house to provide a very handsome supper and wine, and everything was served to table in a manner which showed the director neither wanted money, nor was ignorant how it should be laid out.

This proceeding, though it did not take from him the opinion that she was what she appeared to be, yet it gave him thoughts of her which he had not before.—He believed her a *mistress*, but believed her to be one of a superior rank, and began to imagine the possession of her would be much more expensive than at first he had expected. But not being of a humor to grudge anything for his pleasures, he gave himself no farther trouble than what were occasioned by fears of not having money enough to reach her price about him.

Supper being over, which was intermixed with a vast deal of amorous conversation, he began to explain himself more than he had done; and both by his words and behavior let her know he would not be denied that happiness the freedoms she allowed had made him hope.—It was in vain; she would have retracted the encouragement she had given.—In vain she endeavored to delay, till the next meeting, the fulfilling of his wishes.—She had now gone too far to retreat.—*He* was bold;—he was resolute. *She* fearful—confused, altogether unprepared to resist in such encounters, and rendered more so by the extreme liking she had to him.—Shocked, however, at the apprehension of really losing her honor, she struggled all she could, and was just going to reveal the whole secret of her name and quality, when the thoughts of the liberty he



had taken with her, and those he still continued to prosecute, prevented her, with representing the danger of being exposed, and the whole affair made a theme for public ridicule.—Thus much, indeed, she told him, that she was a virgin, and had assumed this manner of behavior only to engage him. But that he little regarded, or if he had, would have been far from obliging him to desist;—nay, in the present burning eagerness of desire, 'tis probable, that had he been acquainted both with who and what she really was, the knowledge of her birth would not have influenced him with respect sufficient to have curbed the wild exuberance of his luxurious wishes, or made him in that longing, that impatient moment, change the form of his addresses. In fine, she was undone; and he gained a victory, so highly rapturous, that had he known over whom, scarce could he have triumphed more. Her tears, however, and the distraction she appeared in, after the ruinous ecstasy was past, as it heightened his wonder, so it abated his satisfaction.—He could not imagine for what reason a woman, who, if she intended not to be a *mistress*, had counterfeited the part of one, and taken so much pains to engage him, should lament a consequence which she could not but expect, and till the last test, seemed inclinable to grant; and was both surprised and troubled at the mystery.—He omitted nothing that he thought might make her easy; and still retaining an opinion that the hope of interest<sup>8</sup> had been the chief motive which had led her to act in the manner she had done, and believing that she might know so little of him as to suppose, now she had nothing left to give, he might not make that recompense she expected for her favors: to put her out of that pain, he pulled out of his pocket a purse of gold, entreating her to accept of that as an earnest of what he intended to do for her; assuring her, with ten thousand protestations, that he would spare nothing which his whole estate could purchase, to procure her content and happiness. This treatment made her quite forget the part she had assumed, and throwing it from her with an air of disdain, Is this a reward (*said she*) for condescensions,<sup>9</sup> such as I have yielded to?—Can all the wealth you are possessed of make a reparation for my loss of honor?

—Oh! no, I am undone beyond the power of heaven itself to help me!—She uttered many more such exclamations; which the amazed *Beauplaisir* heard without being able to reply to, till by degrees sinking from that rage of temper, her eyes resumed their softening glances, and guessing at the consternation he was in, No, my dear *Beauplaisir*, (*added she*) your love alone can compensate for the shame you have involved me in; be you sincere and constant, and I hereafter shall, perhaps, be satisfied with my fate, and forgive myself the folly that betrayed me to you.

*Beauplaisir* thought he could not have a better opportunity than these words gave him of inquiring who she was, and wherefore she had feigned herself to be of a profession which he was now convinced she was not; and after he had made her a thousand vows of an affection as inviolable and ardent as she could wish to find in him, entreated she would inform him by what means his happiness had been brought about, and also to whom he was indebted for the bliss he had enjoyed.—Some remains of yet unextinguished modesty, and sense of shame, made her blush exceedingly at this demand; but recollecting herself in a little time, she told him so much of the truth, as to what related to the frolic she had taken of satisfying her curiosity in what manner *mistresses*, of the sort she appeared to be, were treated by those who addressed them; but forbore discovering her true name and quality, for the reasons she had done before, resolving, if he boasted of this affair, he should not have it in his power to touch her character. She therefore said she was the daughter of a country gentleman, who was come to town to buy clothes, and that she was called *Fantomina*. He had no reason to distrust the truth of this story, and was therefore satisfied with it; but did not doubt by the beginning of her conduct, but that in the end she would be in reality the thing she so artfully had counterfeited; and had good nature enough to pity the misfortunes he imagined would be her lot. But to tell her so, or offer his advice in that point, was not his business, at least as yet.

They parted not till towards morning; and she obliged him to a willing vow of visiting her the next day at three in the afternoon. It

was too late for her to go home that night, therefore she contented herself with lying there. In the morning she sent for the woman of the house to come up to her; and easily perceiving, by her manner, that she was a woman who might be influenced by gifts, made her a present of a couple of broad pieces,<sup>1</sup> and desired her, that if the gentleman who had been there the night before should ask any questions concerning her, that he should be told, she was lately come out of the country, had lodged there about a fortnight, and that her name was *Fantomina*. I shall (*also added she*) lie but seldom here; nor, indeed, ever come but in those times when I expect to meet him. I would, therefore, have you order it so, that he may think I am but just gone out, if he should happen by any accident to call when I am not here; for I would not, for the world, have him imagine I do not constantly lodge here. The landlady assured her she would do everything as she desired, and gave her to understand she wanted not<sup>2</sup> the gift of secrecy.

Everything being ordered at this home for the security of her reputation, she repaired to the other, where she easily excused to an unsuspecting aunt, with whom she boarded, her having been abroad all night, saying, she went with a gentleman and his lady in a barge to a little country seat of theirs up the river, all of them designing to return the same evening; but that one of the bargemen happening to be taken ill on the sudden, and no other waterman to be got that night, they were obliged to tarry till morning. Thus did this lady's wit and vivacity assist her in all but where it was most needful.—She had discernment to foresee and avoid all those ills which might attend the loss of her *reputation*, but was wholly blind to those of the ruin of her *virtue*; and having managed her affairs so as to secure the *one*, grew perfectly easy with the remembrance she had forfeited the *other*.—The more she reflected on the merits of *Beauplaisir*, the more she excused herself for what she had done; and the prospect of that continued bliss she expected to share with him took from her all remorse for having engaged in an affair which promised her so much satisfaction, and in which she found not the least danger of misfortune.—If he is really (*said she, to herself*) the

faithful, the constant lover he has sworn to be, how charming will be our amour?—And if he should be false, grow satiated, like other men, I shall but, at the worst, have the private vexation of knowing I have lost him;—the intrigue being a secret, my disgrace will be so too.—I shall hear no whispers as I pass,—She is forsaken.—The odious word *forsaken* will never wound my ears; nor will my wrongs excite either the mirth or pity of the talking world.—It would not be even in the power of my undoer himself to triumph over me; and while he laughs at, and perhaps despises the fond, the yielding *Fantomina*, he will revere and esteem the virtuous, the reserved lady.—In this manner did she applaud her own conduct, and exult with the imagination that she had more prudence than all her sex beside. And it must be confessed, indeed, that she preserved an economy<sup>3</sup> in the management of this intrigue beyond what almost any woman but herself ever did: in the first place, by making no person in the world a confidant in it; and in the next, in concealing from *Beauplaisir* himself the knowledge who she was; for though she met him three or four days in a week at that lodging she had taken for that purpose, yet as much as he employed her time and thoughts, she was never missed from any assembly she had been accustomed to frequent.—The business of her love has engrossed her till six in the evening, and before seven she has been dressed in a different habit, and in another place.—Slippers, and a night-gown loosely flowing, has been the garb in which he has left the languishing *Fantomina*;—laced and adorned with all the blaze of jewels has he, in less than an hour after, beheld at the royal chapel, the palace gardens, drawing-room, opera, or play, the haughty awe-inspiring lady.—A thousand times has he stood amazed at the prodigious likeness between his little mistress and this court beauty; but was still as far from imagining they were the same as he was the first hour he had accosted her in the playhouse, though it is not impossible but that her resemblance to this celebrated lady might keep his inclination alive something longer than otherwise they would have been; and that it was to the thoughts of this (as he

supposed) unenjoyed charmer she owed in great measure the vigor of his latter caresses.

But he varied not so much from his sex as to be able to prolong desire to any great length after possession. The rifled charms of *Fantomina* soon lost their poignancy,<sup>4</sup> and grew tasteless and insipid; and when the season of the year inviting the company to the *Bath*,<sup>5</sup> she offered to accompany him, he made an excuse to go without her. She easily perceived his coldness, and the reason why he pretended her going would be inconvenient, and endured as much from the discovery as any of her sex could do. She dissembled it, however, before him, and took her leave of him with the show of no other concern than his absence occasioned. But this she did to take from him all suspicion of her following him, as she intended, and had already laid a scheme for.—From her first finding out that he designed to leave her behind, she plainly saw it was for no other reason than that being tired of her conversation, he was willing to be at liberty to pursue new conquests; and wisely considering that complaints, tears, swoonings, and all the extravagancies which women make use of in such cases have little prevalence over a heart inclined to rove, and only serve to render those who practice them more contemptible, by robbing them of that beauty which alone can bring back the fugitive lover, she resolved to take another course; and remembering the height of transport she enjoyed when the agreeable *Beauplaisir* kneeled at her feet, imploring her first favors, she longed to prove the same again. Not but a woman of her beauty and accomplishments might have beheld a thousand in that condition *Beauplaisir* had been; but with her sex's modesty, she had not also thrown off another virtue equally valuable, though generally unfortunate, *constancy*. She loved *Beauplaisir*; it was only he whose solicitations could give her pleasure; and had she seen the whole species despairing, dying for her sake, it might, perhaps, have been a satisfaction to her pride, but none to her more tender inclination.—Her design was once more to engage him; to hear him sigh, to see him languish, to feel the strenuous pressures of his eager arms, to be compelled, to be sweetly forced to what she wished with equal

ardor, was what she wanted, and what she had formed a stratagem to obtain, in which she promised herself success.

She no sooner heard he had left the town, than making a pretense to her aunt that she was going to visit a relation in the country, went towards *Bath*, attended but by two servants, who she found reasons to quarrel with on the road and discharged. Clothing herself in a habit she had brought with her, she forsook the coach and went into a wagon, in which equipage she arrived at *Bath*. The dress she was in was a round-eared cap, a short red petticoat, and a little jacket of gray stuff; all the rest of her accoutrements were answerable to<sup>6</sup> these, and joined with a broad country dialect, a rude unpolished air, which she, having been bred in these parts, knew very well how to imitate, with her hair and eye-brows blacked, made it impossible for her to be known, or taken for any other than what she seemed. Thus disguised did she offer herself to service in the house where *Beauplaisir* lodged, having made it her business to find out immediately where he was. Notwithstanding this metamorphosis she was still extremely pretty; and the mistress of the house happening at that time to want a maid, was very glad of the opportunity of taking her. She was presently<sup>7</sup> received into the family; and had a post in it (such as she would have chose, had she been left at her liberty), that of making the gentlemen's beds, getting them their breakfasts, and waiting on them in their chambers. Fortune in this exploit was extremely on her side; there were no others of the male sex in the house than an old gentleman who had lost the use of his limbs with the rheumatism, and had come thither for the benefit of the waters, and her beloved *Beauplaisir*; so that she was in no apprehensions of any amorous violence, but where she wished to find it. Nor were her designs disappointed. He was fired with the first sight of her; and though he did not presently take any farther notice of her than giving her two or three hearty kisses, yet she, who now understood that language but too well, easily saw they were the prelude to more substantial joys.—Coming the next morning to bring his chocolate, as he had ordered, he caught her by the pretty leg, which the shortness of

her petticoat did not in the least oppose; then pulling her gently to him, asked her, how long she had been at service?—How many sweethearts she had? If she had ever been in love? and many other such questions, befitting one of the degree<sup>8</sup> she appeared to be. All which she answered with such seeming innocence, as more enflamed the amorous heart of him who talked to her. He compelled her to sit in his lap; and gazing on her blushing beauties, which, if possible, received addition from her plain and rural dress, he soon lost the power of containing himself.—His wild desires burst out in all his words and actions: he called her little angel, cherubim, swore he must enjoy her, though death were to be the consequence, devoured her lips, her breasts with greedy kisses, held to his burning bosom her half-yielding, half-reluctant body, nor suffered her to get loose till he had ravaged all, and glutted each rapacious sense with the sweet beauties of the pretty *Celia*, for that was the name she bore in this second expedition.—Generous as liberality itself to all who gave him joy this way, he gave her a handsome sum of gold, which she durst not now refuse, for fear of creating some mistrust, and losing the heart she so lately had regained; therefore taking it with an humble curtsy, and a well counterfeited show of surprise and joy, cried, O law, Sir! what must I do for all this? He laughed at her simplicity, and kissing her again, though less fervently than he had done before, bad her not be out of the way when he came home at night. She promised she would not, and very obediently kept her word.

His stay at *Bath* exceeded not a month; but in that time his supposed country lass had persecuted him so much with her fondness that in spite of the eagerness with which he first enjoyed her, he was at last grown more weary of her than he had been of *Fantomina*: which she perceiving, would not be troublesome, but quitting her service remained privately in the town till she heard he was on his return; and in that time provided herself of another disguise to carry on a third plot, which her inventing brain had furnished her with, once more to renew his twice-decayed ardors. The dress she had ordered to be made was such as widows wear in



their first mourning, which, together with the most afflicted and penitential countenance that ever was seen, was no small alteration to her who used to seem all gaiety.—To add to this, her hair, which she was accustomed to wear very loose, both when *Fantomina* and *Celia*, was now tied back so straight, and her pinn<sup>9</sup>ers coming so very forward, that there was none of it to be seen. In fine, her habit and her air were so much changed, that she was not more difficult to be known in the rude country *girl*, than she was now in the sorrowful *widow*.

She knew that *Beauplaisir* came alone in his chariot to the *Bath*, and in the time of her being servant in the house where he lodged, heard nothing of anybody that was to accompany him to *London*, and hoped he would return in the same manner he had gone. She therefore hired horses and a man to attend her to an inn about ten miles on this side *Bath*, where having discharged them, she waited till the chariot should come by; which when it did, and she saw that he was alone in it, she called to him that drove it to stop a moment, and going to the door saluted the master with these words:

The distressed and wretched, Sir (*said she*), never fail to excite compassion in a generous mind; and I hope I am not deceived in my opinion that yours is such.—You have the appearance of a gentleman, and cannot, when you hear my story, refuse that assistance which is in your power to give to an unhappy woman, who without it may be rendered the most miserable of all created beings.

It would not be very easy to represent the surprise so odd an address created in the mind of him to whom it was made.—She had not the appearance of one who wanted charity; and what other favor she required he could not conceive; but telling her she might command anything in his power, gave her encouragement to declare herself in this manner. You may judge (*resumed she*), by the melancholy garb I am in, that I have lately lost all that ought to be valuable to womankind; but it is impossible for you to guess the greatness of my misfortune, unless you had known my husband, who was master of every perfection to endear him to a wife's



affections.—But, notwithstanding I look on myself as the most unhappy of my sex in out-living him, I must so far obey the dictates of my discretion as to take care of the little fortune he left behind him, which being in the hands of a brother of his in *London*, will be all carried off to *Holland*, where he is going to settle; if I reach not the town before he leaves it, I am undone for ever.—To which end I left *Bristol*, the place where we lived, hoping to get a place in the stage<sup>1</sup> at *Bath*, but they were all taken up before I came; and being, by a hurt I got in a fall, rendered incapable of traveling any long journey on horseback, I have no way to go to *London*, and must be inevitably ruined in the loss of all I have on earth, without<sup>2</sup> you have good nature enough to admit me to take part of your chariot.

Here the feigned widow ended her sorrowful tale, which had been several times interrupted by a parenthesis of sighs and groans; and *Beauplaisir*, with a complaisant and tender air, assured her of his readiness to serve her in things of much greater consequence than what she desired of him; and told her it would be an impossibility of denying a place in his chariot to a lady, who he could not behold without yielding one in his heart. She answered the compliments he made her but with tears, which seemed to stream in such abundance from her eyes that she could not keep her handkerchief from her face one moment. Being come into the chariot, *Beauplaisir* said a thousand handsome things to persuade her from giving way to so violent a grief, which, he told her, would not only be destructive to her beauty, but likewise her health. But all his endeavors for consolation appeared ineffectual, and he began to think he should have but a dull journey, in the company of one who seemed so obstinately devoted to the memory of her dead husband that there was no getting a word from her on any other theme.—But bethinking himself of the celebrated story of the *Ephesian* matron,<sup>3</sup> it came into his head to make trial, she who seemed equally susceptible of *sorrow*, might not also be so too of *love*: and having began a discourse on almost every other topic, and finding her still incapable of answering, resolved to put it to the proof, if this would have no more effect to rouse her sleeping spirits.—With a gay air,

therefore, though accompanied with the greatest modesty and respect, he turned the conversation, as though without design, on that joy-giving passion, and soon discovered that was indeed the subject she was best pleased to be entertained with; for on his giving her a hint to begin upon, never any tongue ran more voluble than hers, on the prodigious power it had to influence the souls of those possessed of it, to actions even the most distant from their intentions, principles, or humors.—From that she passed to a description of the happiness of mutual affection;—the unspeakable ecstasy of those who meet with equal ardency; and represented it in colors so lively, and disclosed by the gestures with which her words were accompanied, and the accent of her voice so true a feeling of what she said, that *Beauplaisir*, without being as stupid as he was really the contrary, could not avoid perceiving there were seeds of fire not yet extinguished in this fair widow's soul, which wanted but the kindling breath of tender sighs to light into a blaze.—He now thought himself as fortunate, as some moments before he had the reverse; and doubted not but that before they parted, he should find a way to dry the tears of this lovely mourner, to the satisfaction of them both. He did not, however, offer, as he had done to *Fantomina* and *Celia*, to urge his passion directly to her, but by a thousand little softening artifices, which he well knew how to use, gave her leave to guess he was enamored. When they came to the inn where they were to lie, he declared himself somewhat more freely, and perceiving she did not resent it past forgiveness, grew more encroaching still.—He now took the liberty of kissing away her tears, and catching the sighs as they issued from her lips; telling her if grief was infectious, he was resolved to have his share; protesting he would gladly exchange passions with her, and be content to bear her load of *sorrow*, if she would as willingly ease the burden of his *love*.—She said little in answer to the strenuous pressures with which at last he ventured to enfold her, but not thinking it decent, for the character she had assumed, to yield so suddenly, and unable to deny both his and her own inclinations, she counterfeited a fainting, and fell motionless upon his breast.—He had no great notion that she was in a real fit, and the room they supped in

happening to have a bed in it, he took her in his arms and laid her on it, believing that whatever her distemper was, that was the most proper place to convey her to.—He laid himself down by her, and endeavored to bring her to herself; and she was too grateful to her kind physician at her returning sense, to remove from the posture he had put her in, without his leave.

It may, perhaps, seem strange that *Beauplaisir* should in such near intimacies continue still deceived. I know there are men who will swear it is an impossibility, and that no disguise could hinder them from knowing a woman they had once enjoyed. In answer to these scruples, I can only say, that besides the alteration which the change of dress made in her, she was so admirably skilled in the art of feigning that she had the power of putting on almost what face she pleased, and knew so exactly how to form her behavior to the character she represented that all the comedians<sup>4</sup> at both playhouses are infinitely short of her performances. She could vary her very glances, tune her voice to accents the most different imaginable from those in which she spoke when she appeared herself.—These aids from nature, joined to the wiles of art, and the distance between the places where the imagined *Fantomina* and *Celia* were, might very well prevent his having any thought that they were the same, or that the fair *widow* was either of them. It never so much as entered his head, and though he did fancy he observed in the face of the latter, features which were not altogether unknown to him, yet he could not recollect when or where he had known them;—and being told by her, that from her birth she had never removed from *Bristol*, a place where he never was, he rejected the belief of having seen her, and supposed his mind had been deluded by an idea of some other, whom she might have a resemblance of.

They passed the time of their journey in as much happiness as the most luxurious gratification of wild desires could make them; and when they came to the end of it, parted not without a mutual promise of seeing each other often.—He told her to what place she should direct a letter to him; and she assured him she would send to

let him know where to come to her, as soon as she was fixed in lodgings.

She kept her promise; and charmed with the continuance of his eager fondness, went not home but into private lodgings, whence she wrote to him to visit her the first opportunity, and inquire for the Widow *Bloomer*.—She had no sooner dispatched this billet<sup>5</sup> than she repaired to the house where she had lodged as *Fantomina*, charging the people if *Beauplaisir* should come there, not to let him know she had been out of town. From thence she wrote to him, in a different hand, a long letter of complaint, that he had been so cruel in not sending one letter to her all the time he had been absent, entreated to see him, and concluded with subscribing herself his unalterably affectionate *Fantomina*. She received in one day answers to both these. The first contained these lines:

To the Charming Mrs. BLOOMER,

*It would be impossible, my Angel! for me to express the thousandth part of that infinity of transport, the sight of your dear letter gave me.—Never was woman formed to charm like you: never did any look like you,—write like you,—bless like you;—nor did ever man adore as I do.—Since yesterday we parted, I have seemed a body without a soul; and had you not by this inspiring billet, gave me new life, I know not what by tomorrow I should have been.—I will be with you this evening about five.—O, 'tis an age till then!—But the cursed formalities of duty oblige me to dine with my lord—who never rises from table till that hour;—therefore adieu till then sweet lovely mistress of the soul and all the faculties of*

Your most faithful,  
BEAUPLAISIR.

The other was in this manner:

To the Lovely FANTOMINA,

*If you were half so sensible as you ought of your own power of charming, you would be assured, that to be unfaithful or unkind to*

*you would be among the things that are in their very natures impossibilities.—It was my misfortune, not my fault, that you were not persecuted every post with a declaration of my unchanging passion; but I had unluckily forgot the name of the woman at whose house you are, and knew not how to form a direction that it might come safe to your hands.—And, indeed, the reflection how you might misconstrue my silence, brought me to town some weeks sooner than I intended—If you knew how I have languished to renew those blessings I am permitted to enjoy in your society, you would rather pity than condemn*

Your most faithful,  
BEAUPLAISIR.

*P.S. I fear I cannot see you till tomorrow; some business has unluckily fallen out that will engross my hours till then.—Once more, my dear, Adieu.*

Traitor! (*cried she*) as soon as she had read them, 'tis thus our silly, fond, believing sex are served when they put faith in man. So had I been deceived and cheated, had I like the rest believed, and sat down mourning in absence, and vainly waiting recovered tendernesses.—How do some women (*continued she*) make their life a hell, burning in fruitless expectations, and dreaming out their days in hopes and fears, then wake at last to all the horror of despair?—But I have outwitted even the most subtle of the deceiving kind, and while he thinks to fool me, is himself the only beguiled person.

She made herself, most certainly, extremely happy in the reflection on the success of her stratagems; and while the knowledge of his inconstancy and levity of nature kept her from having that real tenderness for him she would else have had, she found the means of gratifying the inclination she had for his agreeable person in as full a manner as she could wish. She had all the sweets of love, but as yet had tasted none of the gall, and was in a state of contentment which might be envied by the more delicate.

When the expected hour arrived, she found that her lover had lost no part of the fervency with which he had parted from her; but when the next day she received him as *Fantomina*, she perceived a prodigious difference; which led her again into reflections on the unaccountableness of men's fancies, who still<sup>6</sup> prefer the last conquest, only because it is the last.—Here was an evident proof of it; for there could not be a difference in merit, because they were the same person; but the Widow *Bloomer* was a more new acquaintance than *Fantomina*, and therefore esteemed more valuable. This, indeed, must be said of *Beauplaisir*, that he had a greater share of good nature than most of his sex, who, for the most part, when they are weary of an intrigue, break it entirely off, without any regard to the despair of the abandoned nymph. Though he retained no more than a bare pity and complaisance<sup>7</sup> for *Fantomina*, yet believing she loved him to an excess, would not entirely forsake her, though the continuance of his visits was now become rather a penance than a pleasure.

The Widow *Bloomer* triumphed some time longer over the heart of this inconstant, but at length her sway was at an end, and she sunk in this character to the same degree of tastelessness as she had done before in that of *Fantomina* and *Celia*.—She presently perceived it, but bore it as she had always done; it being but what she expected, she had prepared herself for it, and had another project in *embryo* which she soon ripened into action. She did not, indeed, complete it altogether so suddenly as she had done the others, by reason there must be persons employed in it; and the aversion she had to any *confidants* in her affairs, and the caution with which she had hitherto acted, and which she was still determined to continue, made it very difficult for her to find a way without breaking through that resolution to compass what she wished.—She got over the difficulty at last, however, by proceeding in a manner, if possible, more extraordinary than all her former behavior.—Muffling herself up in her hood one day, she went into the park about the hour when there are a great many necessitous gentlemen, who think themselves above doing what they call little

things for a maintenance, walking in the *Mall*, to take a *Camelion* treat,<sup>8</sup> and fill their stomachs with air instead of meat. Two of those, who by their physiognomy she thought most proper for her purpose, she beckoned to come to her; and taking them into a walk more remote from company, began to communicate the business she had with them in these words: I am sensible, gentlemen (*said she*), that, through the blindness of fortune and partiality of the world, merit frequently goes unrewarded, and that those of the best pretensions meet with the least encouragement.—I ask your pardon (*continued she*), perceiving they seemed surprised, if I am mistaken in the notion that you two may, perhaps, be of the number of those who have reason to complain of the injustice of fate; but if you are such as I take you for, I have a proposal to make you which may be of some little advantage to you. Neither of them made any immediate answer, but appeared buried in consideration for some moments. At length, We should, doubtless, madam (*said one of them*), willingly come into any measures to oblige you, provided they are such as may bring us into no danger, either as to our persons or reputations. That which I require of you (*resumed she*), has nothing in it criminal. All that I desire is *secrecy* in what you are entrusted, and to disguise yourselves in such a manner as you cannot be known, if hereafter seen by the person on whom you are to impose.—In fine, the business is only an innocent frolic, but if blazed abroad might be taken for too great a freedom in me.—Therefore, if you resolve to assist me, here are five pieces to drink my health and assure you, that I have not discoursed you on an affair I design not to proceed in; and when it is accomplished fifty more lie ready for your acceptance. These words, and above all the money, which was a sum which, 'tis probable, they had not seen of a long time, made them immediately assent to all she desired, and press for the beginning of their employment. But things were not yet ripe for execution; and she told them that the next day they should be let into the secret, charging them to meet her in the same place at an hour she appointed. 'Tis hard to say, which of these parties went away best pleased; *they*, that fortune had sent them so unexpected

a windfall; or *she*, that she had found persons who appeared so well qualified to serve her.

Indefatigable in the pursuit of whatsoever her humor was bent upon, she had no sooner left her new-engaged emissaries than she went in search of a house for the completing her project.—She pitched on one very large and magnificently furnished, which she hired by the week, giving them the money beforehand to prevent any inquiries. The next day she repaired to the park, where she met the punctual squires of low degree; and ordering them to follow her to the house she had taken, told them they must condescend to appear like servants, and gave each of them a very rich livery. Then writing a letter to *Beauplaisir*, in a character vastly different from either of those she had made use of as *Fantomina*, or the fair Widow *Bloomer*, ordered one of them to deliver it into his own hands, to bring back an answer, and to be careful that he sifted out nothing of the truth.—I do not fear (*said she*), that you should discover to him who I am, because that is a secret of which you yourselves are ignorant; but I would have you be so careful in your replies, that he may not think the concealment springs from any other reasons than your great integrity to your trust.—Seem therefore to know my whole affairs; and let your refusing to make him partaker in the secret appear to be only the effect of your zeal for my interest and reputation. Promises of entire fidelity on the one side, and reward on the other, being past, the messenger made what haste he could to the house of *Beauplaisir*; and being there told where he might find him, performed exactly the injunction that had been given him. But never astonishment exceeding that which *Beauplaisir* felt at the reading this billet, in which he found these lines:

To the All-conquering BEAUPLAISIR.

*I imagine not that 'tis a new thing to you, to be told you are the greatest charm in nature to our sex. I shall therefore, not to fill up my letter with any impertinent praises on your wit or person, only tell you that I am infinite in love with both, and if you have a heart not too deeply engaged, should think myself the happiest of my sex*



*in being capable of inspiring it with some tenderness.—There is but one thing in my power to refuse you, which is the knowledge of my name, which believing the sight of my face will render no secret, you must not take it ill that I conceal from you.—The bearer of this is a person I can trust; send by him your answer; but endeavor not to dive into the meaning of this mystery, which will be impossible for you to unravel, and at the same time very much disoblige me.—But that you may be in no apprehensions of being imposed on by a woman unworthy of your regard, I will venture to assure you, the first and greatest men in the kingdom would think themselves blessed to have that influence over me you have, though unknown to yourself acquired.—But I need not go about to raise your curiosity, by giving you any idea of what my person is; if you think fit to be satisfied, resolve to visit me tomorrow about three in the afternoon; and though my face is hid, you shall not want sufficient demonstration that she who takes these unusual measures to commence a friendship with you is neither old, nor deformed. Till then I am,*

Yours,  
INCOGNITA.

He had scarce come to the conclusion before he asked the person who brought it, from what place he came;—the name of the lady he served;—if she were a wife, or widow, and several other questions directly opposite to the directions of the letter; but silence would have availed him as much as did all those testimonies of curiosity. No *Italian Bravo*,<sup>9</sup> employed in a business of the like nature, performed his office with more artifice; and the impatient inquirer was convinced, that nothing but doing as he was desired could give him any light into the character of the woman who declared so violent a passion for him; and little fearing any consequence which could ensue from such an encounter, resolved to rest satisfied till he was informed of everything from herself, not imagining this *Incognita* varied so much from the generality of her sex as to be able to refuse the knowledge of anything to the man she loved with that transcendancy of passion she professed, and

which his many successes with the ladies gave him encouragement enough to believe. He therefore took pen and paper, and answered her letter in terms tender enough for a man who had never seen the person to whom he wrote. The words were as follows:

To the Obliging and Witty INCOGNITA.

*Though to tell me I am happy enough to be liked by a woman such, as by your manner of writing, I imagine you to be, is an honor which I can never sufficiently acknowledge, yet I know not how I am able to content myself with admiring the wonders of your wit alone. I am certain a soul like yours must shine in your eyes with a vivacity which must bless all they look on.—I shall, however, endeavor to restrain myself in those bounds you are pleased to set me, till by the knowledge of my inviolable fidelity, I may be thought worthy of gazing on that heaven I am now but to enjoy in contemplation.—You need not doubt my glad compliance with your obliging summons. There is a charm in your lines which gives too sweet an idea of their lovely author to be resisted.—I am all impatient for the blissful moment which is to throw me at your feet, and give me an opportunity of convincing you that I am,*

Your everlasting slave,

BEAUPLAISIR.

Nothing could be more pleased than she to whom it was directed, at the receipt of this letter; but when she was told how inquisitive he had been concerning her character and circumstances, she could not forbear laughing heartily to think of the tricks she had played him, and applauding her own strength of genius and force of resolution, which by such unthought-of ways could triumph over her lover's inconstancy, and render that very temper,<sup>1</sup> which to other women is the greatest curse, a means to make herself more blessed.—Had he been faithful to me (*said she, to herself*), either as *Fantomina*, or *Celia*, or the *Widow Bloomer*, the most violent passion, if it does not change its object, in time will wither. Possession naturally abates the vigor of desire, and I should have

had, at best, but a cold, insipid, husband-like lover in my arms; but by these arts of passing on him as a new mistress whenever the ardor, which alone makes love a blessing, begins to diminish for the former one, I have him always raving, wild, impatient, longing, dying.—O that all neglected wives and fond abandoned nymphs would take this method!—Men would be caught in their own snare, and have no cause to scorn our easy, weeping, wailing sex! Thus did she pride herself as if secure she never should have any reason to repent the present gaiety of her humor. The hour drawing near in which he was to come, she dressed herself in as magnificent a manner as if she were to be that night at a ball at court, endeavoring to repair the want of those beauties which the vizard<sup>2</sup> should conceal, by setting forth the others with the greatest care and exactness. Her fine shape, and air, and neck appeared to great advantage; and by that which was to be seen of her, one might believe the rest to be perfectly agreeable. *Beauplaisir* was prodigiously charmed, as well with her appearance as with the manner she entertained him. But though he was wild with impatience for the sight of a face which belonged to so exquisite a body, yet he would not immediately press for it, believing before he left her he should easily obtain that satisfaction.—A noble collation being over, he began to sue for the performance of her promise of granting everything he could ask, excepting the sight of her face, and knowledge of her name. It would have been a ridiculous piece of affectation in her to have seemed coy in complying with what she herself had been the first in desiring. She yielded without even a show of reluctance: and if there be any true felicity in an amour such as theirs, both here enjoyed it to the full. But not in the height of all their mutual raptures could he prevail on her to satisfy his curiosity with the sight of her face. She told him that she hoped he knew so much of her as might serve to convince him she was not unworthy of his tenderest regard; and if he could not content himself with that which she was willing to reveal, and which was the conditions of their meeting, dear as he was to her, she would rather part with him for ever than consent to gratify an inquisitiveness

which, in her opinion, had no business with his love. It was in vain that he endeavored to make her sensible of her mistake; and that this restraint was the greatest enemy imaginable to the happiness of them both. She was not to be persuaded, and he was obliged to desist his solicitations, though determined in his mind to compass what he so ardently desired, before he left the house. He then turned the discourse wholly on the violence of the passion he had for her; and expressed the greatest discontent in the world at the apprehensions of being separated;—swore he could dwell for ever in her arms, and with such an undeniable earnestness pressed to be permitted to tarry with her the whole night, that had she been less charmed with his renewed eagerness of desire, she scarce would have had the power of refusing him; but in granting this request, she was not without a thought that he had another reason for making it besides the extremity of his passion, and had it immediately in her head how to disappoint him.

The hours of repose being arrived, he begged she would retire to her chamber; to which she consented, but obliged him to go to bed first; which he did not much oppose, because he supposed she would not lie in her mask, and doubted not but the morning's dawn would bring the wished discovery.—The two imagined servants ushered him to his new lodging; where he lay some moments in all the perplexity imaginable at the oddness of this adventure. But she suffered not these cogitations to be of any long continuance. She came, but came in the dark; which being no more than he expected by the former part of her proceedings, he said nothing of; but as much satisfaction as he found in her embraces, nothing ever longed for the approach of day with more impatience than he did. At last it came; but how great was his disappointment, when by the noises he heard in the street, the hurry of the coaches, and the cries of penny-merchants,<sup>3</sup> he was convinced it was night nowhere but with him? He was still in the same darkness as before; for she had taken care to blind the windows in such a manner that not the least chink was left to let in day.—He complained of her behavior in terms that she would not have been able to resist yielding to, if she had not been

certain it would have been the ruin of her passion.—She therefore answered him only as she had done before; and getting out of the bed from him, flew out of the room with too much swiftness for him to have overtaken her, if he had attempted it. The moment she left him, the two attendants entered the chamber, and plucking down the implements which had screened him from the knowledge of that which he so much desired to find out, restored his eyes once more to day.—They attended to assist him in dressing, brought him tea, and by their obsequiousness, let him see there was but one thing which the mistress of them would not gladly oblige him in.—He was so much out of humor, however, at the disappointment of his curiosity, that he resolved never to make a second visit.—Finding her in an outer room, he made no scruple of expressing the sense he had of the little trust she reposed in him, and at last plainly told her, he could not submit to receive obligations from a lady who thought him incapable of keeping a secret, which she made no difficulty of letting her servants into.—He resented,—he once more entreated,—he said all that man could do, to prevail on her to unfold the mystery; but all his adjurations were fruitless; and he went out of the house determined never to re-enter it, till she should pay the price of his company with the discovery of her face and circumstances.—She suffered him to go with this resolution, and doubted not but he would recede from it, when he reflected on the happy moments they had passed together; but if he did not, she comforted herself with the design of forming some other stratagem, with which to impose on him a fourth time.

She kept the house and her gentlemen-equipage for about a fortnight, in which time she continued to write to him as *Fantomina* and the Widow *Bloomer*, and received the visits he sometimes made to each; but his behavior to both was grown so cold, that she began to grow as weary of receiving his now insipid caresses as he was of offering them. She was beginning to think in what manner she should drop these two characters, when the sudden arrival of her mother, who had been some time in a foreign country, obliged her to put an immediate stop to the course of her whimsical adventures.—

That lady, who was severely virtuous, did not approve of many things she had been told of the conduct of her daughter; and though it was not in the power of any person in the world to inform her of the truth of what she had been guilty of, yet she heard enough to make her keep her afterwards in a restraint, little agreeable to her humor, and the liberties to which she had been accustomed.

But this confinement was not the greatest part of the trouble of this now afflicted lady. She found the consequences of her amorous follies would be, without almost a miracle, impossible to be concealed.—She was with child; and though she would easily have found means to have screened even this from the knowledge of the world, had she been at liberty to have acted with the same unquestionable authority over herself as she did before the coming of her mother, yet now all her invention was at a loss for a stratagem to impose on a woman of her penetration.—By eating little, lacing prodigious straight, and the advantage of a great hoop-petticoat, however, her bigness was not taken notice of, and, perhaps, she would not have been suspected till the time of her going into the country, where her mother designed to send her, and from whence she intended to make her escape to some place where she might be delivered with secrecy, if the time of it had not happened much sooner than she expected.—A ball being at court, the good old lady was willing she should partake of the diversion of it as a farewell to the town.—It was there she was seized with those pangs, which none in her condition are exempt from.—She could not conceal the sudden rack<sup>4</sup> which all at once invaded her; or had her tongue been mute, her wildly rolling eyes, the distortion of her features, and the convulsions which shook her whole frame, in spite of her, would have revealed she labored under some terrible shock of nature.—Everybody was surprised, everybody was concerned, but few guessed at the occasion.—Her mother grieved beyond expression, doubted not but she was struck with the hand of death; and ordered her to be carried home in a chair,<sup>5</sup> while herself followed in another.—A physician was immediately sent for; but he presently perceiving what was her distemper, called the old lady

aside and told her, it was not a doctor of his sex, but one of her own, her daughter stood in need of.—Never was astonishment and horror greater than that which seized the soul of this afflicted parent at these words. She could not for a time believe the truth of what she heard; but he insisting on it, and conjuring her to send for a midwife, she was at length convinced of it.—All the pity and tenderness she had been for some moment before possessed of now vanished, and were succeeded by an adequate<sup>6</sup> shame and indignation.—She flew to the bed where her daughter was lying, and telling her what she had been informed of, and which she was now far from doubting, commanded her to reveal the name of the person whose insinuations<sup>7</sup> had drawn her to this dishonor.—It was a great while before she could be brought to confess anything, and much longer before she could be prevailed on to name the man whom she so fatally had loved; but the rack of nature growing more fierce, and the enraged old lady protesting no help should be afforded her while she persisted in her obstinacy, she, with great difficulty and hesitation in her speech, at last pronounced the name of *Beauplaisir*. She had no sooner satisfied her weeping mother, than that sorrowful lady sent messengers at the same time for a midwife, and for that gentleman who had occasioned the other's being wanted.—He happened by accident to be at home, and immediately obeyed the summons, though prodigiously surprised what business a lady so much a stranger to him could have to impart.—But how much greater was his amazement, when taking him into her closet,<sup>8</sup> she there acquainted him with her daughter's misfortune, of the discovery she had made, and how far he was concerned in it?—All the idea one can form of wild astonishment was mean to what he felt.—He assured her that the young lady her daughter was a person whom he had never, more than at a distance, admired;—that he had indeed spoke to her in public company, but that he never had a thought which tended to her dishonor.—His denials, if possible, added to the indignation she was before enflamed with.—She had no longer patience; and carrying him into the chamber, where she was just delivered of a fine girl, cried out, I will not be imposed on: the



truth by one of you shall be revealed.—*Beauplaisir* being brought to the bedside, was beginning to address himself to the lady in it, to beg she would clear the mistake her mother was involved in; when she, covering herself with the clothes, and ready to die a second time with the inward agitations of her soul, shrieked out, Oh, I am undone!—I cannot live, and bear this shame!—But the old lady believing that now or never was the time to dive into the bottom of this mystery, forcing her to rear her head, told her she should not hope to escape the scrutiny of a parent she had dishonored in such a manner, and pointing to *Beauplaisir*, Is this the gentleman (*said she*), to whom you owe your ruin? or have you deceived me by a fictitious tale? Oh! no (*resumed the trembling creature*), he is indeed the innocent cause of my undoing.—Promise me your pardon (*continued she*), and I will relate the means. Here she ceased, expecting what she would reply, which, on hearing *Beauplaisir* cry out, What mean you, madam? I your undoing, who never harbored the least design on you in my life, she did in these words: Though the injury you have done your family (*said she*) is of a nature which cannot justly hope forgiveness, yet be assured, I shall much sooner excuse you when satisfied of the truth than while I am kept in a suspense, if possible, as vexatious as the crime itself is to me. Encouraged by this she related the whole truth. And 'tis difficult to determine if *Beauplaisir*, or the lady, were most surprised at what they heard; he, that he should have been blinded so often by her artifices; or she, that so young a creature should have the skill to make use of them. Both sat for some time in a profound reverie; till at length she broke it first in these words: Pardon, sir (*said she*), the trouble I have given you. I must confess it was with a design to oblige you to repair the supposed injury you had done this unfortunate girl, by marrying her, but now I know not what to say.—The blame is wholly hers, and I have nothing to request further of you, than that you will not divulge the distracted folly she has been guilty of.—He answered her in terms perfectly polite; but made no offer of that which, perhaps, she expected, though could not, now informed of her daughter's proceedings, demand. He assured her, however, that if she would commit the newborn lady to his care, he



would discharge it faithfully. But neither of them would consent to that; and he took his leave, full of cogitations, more confused than ever he had known in his whole life. He continued to visit there, to inquire after her health every day; but the old lady perceiving there was nothing likely to ensue from these civilities but, perhaps, a renewing of the crime, she entreated him to refrain; and as soon as her daughter was in a condition, sent her to a monastery in *France*, the abbess of which had been her particular friend. And thus ended an intrigue which, considering the time it lasted, was as full of variety as any, perhaps, that many ages has produced.

1725

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Edmund Waller, "To A. H., of the different successes of their loves" (1645).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Women to whose charms men drink.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fine pleasure (French).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Social standing.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Harm.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A small hired coach, carried by two men.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sex worker. "Devoirs": dutiful compliments.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Profit.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Humiliations.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Gold coins.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Did not lack.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Careful regulation.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pungency.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A fashionable resort, one hundred miles west of London.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In harmony with.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Immediately.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Social class.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Long flaps on the sides of a cap worn by women of rank.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Stagecoach.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Unless.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Petronius's *Satyricon*, a grieving widow who watches over her husband's burial vault is seduced by a soldier. When one of the bodies he was supposed to be guarding is stolen, she lets him replace it with her husband's.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Actors.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Letter.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Always.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Indulgence.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Chameleons supposedly fed on air. The Mall is a fashionable promenade in St. James's Park.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ruffian for hire.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Habit of mind (inconstancy).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Mask.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Street vendors.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Intense pain.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Carriage.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Equal.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Artful ways of winding into someone's favor.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Private room.[Return to reference 8](#)

# The Rise of the Novel

The origins of English literature's most popular form, the novel, have long been seen to lie in the eighteenth century. Critics have traced a great tradition arising from the fictions of Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and others, carrying forward to the nineteenth century in the work of Jane Austen and Walter Scott, George Eliot and Charles Dickens, to the outstanding experiments in fiction in the twentieth, and the diverse novelistic voices heard in English in the twenty-first. Yet there have been prose fictions in literature for millennia, from works of antiquity such as the *Satyricon* by the Roman author Petronius (ca. 27–66 C.E.) to *Don Quixote* (1605, 1616) by the Spanish master Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616). As far back as the sixteenth century, English fictions were sometimes called “novels” on their title pages (a term, initially signifying a short story about love, taken from Continental Europe). And many eighteenth-century works now classified as novels first appeared under other labels: tale, history, secret history, romance, “the life of,” or “the adventures of.” Why does this period's fiction feel more novelistic to readers of English now than the romances, fables, and other narratives that appeared centuries before? What changes in the conventions and subject matter of fictional prose, in literature's social contexts, and in modes of literary production and consumption led to the emergence in the eighteenth century of the novel as many now recognize it?

Scholars confronting these questions must face the sheer variety of eighteenth-century fictions. Autobiographical adventures that claim to be true, such as Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688; see [p. 152](#)) and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719; see below), and parodies of such stories like Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726; see [p. 377](#)), draw one strand of fictional narrative through outdoor settings as expansive as the globe. But more intimate stories of desire, seduction, and resistance also proliferated in the period, from tales

of disguise and sexual curiosity such as Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* (1725; see [p. 650](#)) to Samuel Richardson's revelations of private domestic spaces and the inner recesses of his characters' minds. Henry Fielding's flair for theatrical comedy and intricate plots, and his self-consciously literary style, enliven his masterpieces *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749). After midcentury, the novel haunted Gothic castles or flowed with the tears and passions of sensibility, though often with ironic twists, as in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) and *A Sentimental Journey* (1768). Frances Burney's novels interweave emotional plots of courtship with keen satirical accounts of elegant social mingling (or attempts at it), while those of Tobias Smollett practice a rougher satire and barrel through less refined settings. Fiction could also offer opportunities for explicit reflections on the meaning of life, as in Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (see [p. 802](#)). As the selection of works in the present volume shows, the eighteenth-century novel takes in so much—from the fantastic to the everyday, the narratively propulsive to the philosophically meditative, the talk of ordinary people to the sophisticated language of the great or the learned—that it has been a challenge to say what one thing it essentially is or does.

One distinctive feature noticed by some novel writers themselves about their works is the closeness of their plots and characters to readers' experiences of real life. Novels "come near us," William Congreve says in his essay early in this section, and are "not so distant from our belief" as the marvelous tales of romance that dominated prose fiction in earlier times. The critic Ian Watt, in his classic scholarly work *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), saw believability as the modern novel's dominant trait and called the ensemble of techniques that achieved it "formal realism," suited especially, he thought, to the practical tastes of a growing readership among the middle ranks of commercial Britain. Scholars of the novel in the decades after Watt's book have supplemented, qualified, and questioned his view by finding other motives shaping the novel form. Defoe's fictions not only grapple with life's hard, empirical facts but also heed the supernatural whisper of Providence and seek spiritual redemption; the scandalous tales and secret histories by writers such

as Delarivier Manley (ca. 1670–1724) present the intrigues of the fabulously rich and powerful, not ordinary people. And the conventions of romance—a love requiring implausible coincidences to prevail, a birthmark that reveals the hero's true identity—never quite go away. The eighteenth-century novel includes a range of impulses much broader than what Watt's theory of formal realism first took into account. Celebrity gossip, religious inspiration, true (or half-true) crime, political allegories, ghost stories, and patterns for proper conduct variously “come near us” by engaging our aspirations, fears, and excited imaginations.

But the understanding in recent decades of the origins of the modern novel has most decisively been enhanced by recognizing the contributions of women authors to its success, widening Watt's focus on Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. As novelists, women shaped the course of literature as they never had before. From Aphra Behn's fictions at the end of the seventeenth century, a tradition of British women's writing arose, including Manley and Haywood, Penelope Aubin (1679?–1738), Mary Davys (1674–1732), Elizabeth Rowe (1674–1737), Sarah Fielding (1710–1768), Sarah Scott (1720–1795), Charlotte Lennox (1730/31?–1804), and Burney—this list could be much expanded. Offering more than mere romantic tales, women fiction writers treated politics and religion, delivered tough-minded satire of women's credulity, men's cruelty, and the culture's unfair gender standards, and surveyed social ills and opportunities. Women authors helped establish the novel's unparalleled flexibility of theme and style, and their works sold at least as well as those of men.

The novel's success in the eighteenth century was buoyed by a growing industry that included booksellers (ancestors of present-day publishers), printers and all the labors associated with printing, and authors, catering to an increasingly literate populace of a Britain growing ever more prosperous. The publishing of works of all kinds dramatically increased: while a mere six thousand separate printed titles were published in the 1630s, the 1710s saw twenty-two thousand, and by the 1790s, about sixty thousand appeared. Readers not only bought but also borrowed books, from new institutions such as subscription libraries and circulating libraries

(which both charged sometimes hefty membership fees). These terms were often used interchangeably, but the former tended to cultivate their collections to suit subscribers' tastes, and the latter bought and sold off their books as public demand changed—and hence offered many novels. (Free public libraries were virtually nonexistent.) A tale of multiple risings—of the middle classes, of literacy, of the book trades, and of new ways to disseminate books to the public—has provided a background for plotting the rise of the novel. And increasing literacy rates among women ensured they were decisively important as consumers of novels as well as producers—a fact often noted with alarm by commentators of the period. In his popular *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), James Fordyce inveighs that the preponderance of novels are “in their nature so shameful, in their tendency so pestiferous, and contain such rank treason against the royalty of Virtue, such horrible violation of all decorum, that she who can bear to peruse them must in her soul be a prostitute, let her reputation in life be what it will” (see below). The vigor of such denunciations testifies to a sense that the novel's power over women was growing.

Yet a complete picture of the novel's production, consumption, breadth of appeal, and social effects contains some surprising facts. Based on sales data and extant records from circulating libraries, we know men read novels at least as much as women, including ones with putatively “feminine” themes like love and courtship. Scholars have also challenged the idea that the “middling sort”—shopkeepers, apprentices, small tradesmen, and others connected with commerce—constituted the novel's principal readership. The gentry, and clergymen and professional men and their families, bought and borrowed the most novels. The rate of new novels' publication rose and fell unevenly through the century. Though Watt concentrated on novelists from the first half, a real surge of new novels came in the late 1780s, and bigger ones followed. And as copious as the publication of novels was in the period, it amounted to only a small proportion of booksellers' and libraries' offerings. Readers seemed to gravitate even more to sermons and other works of religious



devotion, histories, legal and medical works, and especially periodicals.



**An Eighteenth-Century Printer's Shop.** Woodcut, British Library.

A vibrant print culture nonetheless provided the energy and promise of financial gain that the novel needed to flourish. A form that arose "from below," inspired by readers' curiosities and the demands of a growing marketplace, the novel only slowly gained respectability and was by many considered merely an ephemeral entertainment. Unlike high, ancient genres like epic and tragedy, the novel did not have a tradition of learned criticism and commentary to draw on. Many of the most revealing remarks on the theory and practice of novelistic writing appear in what book historians call the paratext of published novels: prefaces, introductions, letters to the reader, dedications, and other matter ancillary to the main text. Outstanding examples of this kind of writing in the cluster that follows help bring the literary aspirations and professional and personal difficulties of the period's novelists to life. In them, authors

beckon to their readers, anticipate criticisms, praise their own invention, and at times lie by insisting they are offering a true story. Some play with familiar literary labels when explaining what they seek to achieve in fiction, as when Fielding calls his *Joseph Andrews* “a comic epic-poem in prose”; others like Richardson extol their work’s high moral purpose.

As the century advanced, periodicals devoted to reviewing newly published works, including novels, were founded, such as the *Monthly Review* (1749–1845) and the *Critical Review* (1756–1817), of which Smollett was first editor. Other periodical essays, outstanding among them Samuel Johnson’s *Rambler* 4 (see below), theorize about the nature and value of fiction. The first full-length book in English discussing the history and significant examples of prose fiction, *The Progress of Romance* by Clara Reeve (see below), appeared in 1785. As a result of the work of critics and literary historians such as Reeve, the English novel as we know it began to take shape: its canon of great early texts, its foundational oppositions (between, for instance, feeling Richardson and ribald Fielding), its special relationship, evolving through the century, to women as authors and readers, and its grip on an enthusiastic if not always discriminating reading public. No form of English literature would have a more illustrious future.



## WILLIAM CONGREVE

William Congreve (1670–1729) is famous for comedies that have been admired by audiences and readers since their first performances, such as *Love for Love* and *The Way of the World* (see [p. 221](#)). But his first publication was *Incognita; or, Love and Duty Reconciled: A Novel* (1692), which appeared when he was twenty-two under a pastoral pseudonym, Cleophil. After the title page proudly identifies its literary type, the preface extols the believability and nearness to ordinary human concerns of novels, in contrast to romances. Yet Congreve's remarks also exemplify the novel's way of leaning on other, more traditionally prestigious genres—in this case, comic drama—to gain literary credit for itself. The setting of *Incognita* in Italy and its love intrigues, masks, and mistaken identities recall motifs common in English stage comedy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Though elegantly crafted, *Incognita* never entered the canon of English fiction. "I would rather praise it than read it," remarked Samuel Johnson in his *Life of Congreve* (1779). But its preface offers a vivid sense of how writers understood what the novel is, decades before the more celebrated fictions of Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson.

# ***From Incognita; or, Love and Duty Reconciled: A Novel***

## ***From The Preface to the Reader***

\* \* \* Romances are generally composed of the constant loves and invincible courages of heroes, heroines, kings and queens, mortals of the first rank, and so forth; where lofty language, miraculous contingencies, and impossible performances elevate and surprise the reader into a giddy delight, which leaves him flat upon the ground whenever he gives off,<sup>1</sup> and vexes him to think how he has suffered himself to be pleased and transported, concerned and afflicted at the several passages which he has read, viz. these knights' success to their damsels' misfortunes, and such like, when he is forced to be very well convinced that 'tis all a lie. Novels are of a more familiar nature; come near us, and represent to us intrigues in practice,<sup>2</sup> delight us with accidents and odd events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unprecedented, such which not being so distant from our belief bring also the pleasure nearer us. Romances give more of wonder, novels more delight. And with reverence be it spoken, and the parallel kept at a due distance, there is something of equality in the proportion which they bear in reference to one another, with that between comedy and tragedy; but the drama is the long extracted from<sup>3</sup> romance and history: 'tis the midwife to industry, and brings forth alive the conceptions of the brain. Minerva walks upon the stage before us, and we are more assured of the real presence of wit when it is delivered viva voce<sup>4</sup>—

Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,  
Quam quae sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, & quae  
Ipse sibi tradit spectator.<sup>5</sup>—Horace.

Since all traditions must indisputably give place to<sup>6</sup> the drama, and since there is no possibility of giving that life to the writing or repetition of a story which it has in the action, I resolved in another beauty<sup>7</sup> to imitate dramatic writing, namely, in the design, contexture and result of the plot. I have not observed it before in a novel. Some I have seen begin with an unexpected accident, which has been the only surprising part of the story, cause enough to make the sequel<sup>8</sup> look flat, tedious, and insipid; for 'tis but reasonable the reader should expect it not to rise, at least to keep upon a level in the entertainment; for so he may be kept on in hopes that at some time or other it may mend; but the other is such a balk<sup>9</sup> to a man, 'tis carrying him up stairs to show him the dining room, and after forcing him to make a meal in the kitchen. This I have not only endeavored to avoid, but also have used a method for the contrary purpose. The design of the novel is obvious, after the first meeting of Aurelian and Hippolito with Incognita and Leonora,<sup>1</sup> and the difficulty is in bringing it to pass, maugre<sup>2</sup> all apparent obstacles, within the compass of two days. How many probable casualties<sup>3</sup> intervene in opposition to the main design, viz. of marrying two couple so oddly engaged in an intricate amour, I leave the reader at his leisure to consider; as also whether every obstacle does not in the progress of the story act as subservient to that purpose, which at first it seems to oppose. In a comedy this would be called the unity of action.<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1692

- Note 1: Stops reading. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: As they (really) are performed. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Is very far from (superior to). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In a living voice (Latin). Minerva is the Roman goddess of wisdom. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: That which enters through the ears affects the mind more languidly than that which is subjected to our faithful eyes, and which a spectator brings to himself (Latin), from *The Art of Poetry*, lines 180–82, by the Roman poet Horace (65–8 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Concede the preeminence of. “Traditions”: all other genres of literature.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Another element of my fiction. “In the action”: in an acted play.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The rest of the story after the beginning.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Obstacle. “The other”: starting off a story on a high note only to offer little afterward.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The two men and two women who pair up in the love plot of Congreve’s novel.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Despite.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Occurrences.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: One of the three “unities” which, by the neoclassic rules for drama derived from Aristotle, a comedy should adhere to: the unity of action was the connection, causal or otherwise, of all the incidents in a plot.[Return to reference 4](#)

## DANIEL DEFOE

Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) had many careers and wrote in many forms and styles before he began, at the age of nearly sixty, to publish the sequence of works for which he is best remembered: prose “autobiographies” of figures with sensational lives, all claiming to be true, all eventually called novels by later generations of grateful readers. He was raised as a Presbyterian and educated at a Dissenting academy at Newington Green in north London. (Not conforming to the doctrines of the Church of England, he could not attend Cambridge or Oxford.) Through the 1680s and early 1690s, he pursued high-stakes business ventures and made risky investments, going bankrupt in 1692 for the spectacular sum of £17,000, and ended up in debtors’ prison. After his release, publishing his work took an increasingly large place among his business enterprises. His long, very popular satirical poem *The True-Born Englishman* (1701) defended his hero, the Protestant and Dutch king of England, William III, by pointing out that people of many faiths and nations have helped create English identity. His satire *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702) impersonated the bigotry against Nonconformists effectively enough to anger both sides: he endured prison and the pillory for it. In 1704, he launched *The Review*, a journal that criticized the government and commented on other topics of public interest, which he ran almost single-handedly until 1713. Soon, however, he was drafted into government service, working as a spy in England and Scotland. For the remainder of the 1710s, he wrote a lot—conduct books, political pamphlets, scandalous “secret histories”—though more was attributed to him, he complained, than he ever wrote. (Correctly identifying Defoe’s writings, many published anonymously, remains a thorny problem for scholars.)

In 1719, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* appeared, “Written by Himself,” the title page informs us.

Defoe had recognized the popularity of travel writing in his time and gave the public more of what it wanted, basing *Crusoe* on stories of famous actual castaways such as Alexander Selkirk. But a pamphlet almost immediately identified Defoe's tale as untrue and attributed it to him. His most famous fictional work thus entered the world not as a novel—a story acknowledging itself as invented, to be admired for its plot's probability and lifelike characters—but rather as something like a fraud. Defoe wrote fascinating but competing things about the truth of his fictions: *Crusoe* was, first, "a just history of fact"—then, while insisting again that it featured "fact" not fictional "romance," he defended "what may be called invention" in the story as justifiable because moral. The sequel, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, came out the same year, and a final installment, *The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe* (1720), offered mostly contemplative and religious musings. After *Crusoe*, Defoe produced more "autobiographies" that would come to be seen as classic English novels: *Moll Flanders* (1722), *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), and *Roxana* (1724), among others. But *Robinson Crusoe* remained his most popular work in Britain and worldwide, never receding from the public consciousness: by some measures, it was the best-selling novel of the 1750s, some twenty years after his death, running to six editions in that decade. In the 1770s and 1780s, booksellers and circulating libraries began openly designating Defoe's first-person biographies as imaginative fiction, and as his: the canon of his novels began to take shape, though scholars have occasionally doubted his authorship of nearly all of them except *Crusoe*.

The power of *Robinson Crusoe*, in its long history as a classic of world literature, lies in its way of connecting Crusoe's extraordinary circumstances to readers' ordinary fantasies and fears and in the large, near-mythic meanings that this connection suggests. Washing up on an uninhabited island, Crusoe excites the reader's basic sense of what is needed to survive in the world, any world, alone. He eventually creates, or imitates, a comfortable mode of life by assuming a range of roles—landowner and farm laborer, builder,

tailor, cobbler, potter, soldier, miller of wheat and baker of bread—usually performed by an entire society. Economists from the eighteenth century on have used him as an allegory of, or foil to, society's division of labor, and its production and consumption of commodities. After building his world, he realizes he is not alone. First a single human footprint on the beach, then a scene of people of the islands that terrifies him, then his violent attack on them and acquisition from among them of his "man" and friend, Friday: all this has served as a parable of British colonialism and encounters with indigenous peoples. Throughout, Crusoe's hauntingly solitary spirituality, his straining to hear the voice of Providence and assure himself of his salvation, offers an image of religious experience in which readers have recognized themselves. Defoe sustains these large meanings not with lofty, learned disquisitions but with a propulsive style personalized to Crusoe. The prose builds and pushes forward like the wave that carries his body to his island. The momentum of the sentences and their sometimes chaotic way of taking in everything moving across the focus of narration—Crusoe's immediate consciousness—carry readers forward also, immersing them in his fictional yet vivid world. Often its details are so concretely haphazard that it seems the only motive to include them must be that they are true—like the "two shoes that were not fellows" washed ashore among his mates' former possessions. Due to Defoe's magnificently full realization of him and his predicament, Crusoe has become the rarest of literary creations: a symbol of the most broadly significant cultural and historical forces, and a unique personage, dynamic, individual, and vivid.

# ***From The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*<sup>1</sup>**

***Written by Himself***

## ***From Preface***

If ever the story of any private man's adventures in the world were worth making public, and were acceptable when published, the editor of this account thinks this will be so.

The wonders of this man's life exceed all that (he thinks) is to be found extant; the life of one man being scarce capable of a greater variety.

The story is told with modesty, with seriousness, and with a religious application of events to the uses to which wise men always apply them, viz. to the instruction of others by this example, and to justify and honor the wisdom of Providence in all the variety of our circumstances, let them happen how they will.

The editor believes the thing to be a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it. And however thinks, because all such things are dispatched,<sup>2</sup> that the improvement of it, as well to the diversion, as to the instruction of the reader, will be the same; and as such, he thinks, without farther compliments to the world, he does them a great service in the publication.





**Crusoe.** Frontispiece of *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, 1719, artist unknown. Clark and Pine, engravers.

---

### [CRUSOE WASHES ASHORE]

Nothing can describe the confusion of thought which I felt when I sunk into the water;<sup>3</sup> for though I swam very well, yet I could not deliver myself from the waves so as to draw breath, till that wave having driven me, or rather carried me a vast way on towards the shore, and having spent itself, went back, and left me upon the land almost dry, but half dead with the water I took in. I had so much presence of mind as well as breath left, that seeing myself nearer the mainland<sup>4</sup> than I expected, I got upon my feet, and endeavored to make on towards the land as fast as I could before another wave should return and take me up again. But I soon found it was impossible to avoid it; for I saw the sea come after me as high as a great hill, and as furious as an enemy, which I had no means or strength to contend with: my business was to hold my breath, and raise myself upon the water, if I could; and so, by swimming to preserve my breathing, and pilot myself towards the shore, if possible; my greatest concern now being that the sea, as it would carry me a great way towards the shore when it came on, might not carry me back again with it when it gave back towards the sea.

The wave that came upon me again buried me at once twenty or thirty foot deep in its own body, and I could feel myself carried with a mighty force and swiftness towards the shore a very great way; but I held my breath, and assisted myself to swim still forward with all my might. I was ready to burst with holding my breath, when, as I felt myself rising up, so, to my immediate relief, I found my head and hands shoot out above the surface of the water; and though it was not two seconds of time that I could keep myself so, yet it relieved me greatly, gave me breath and new courage. I was covered again with water a good while, but not so long but I held it out; and finding the water had spent itself, and began to return, I strook

forward against the return of the waves, and felt ground again with my feet. I stood still a few moments to recover breath, and till the water went from me, and then took to my heels, and run with what strength I had farther towards the shore. But neither would this deliver me from the fury of the sea, which came pouring in after me again; and twice more I was lifted up by the waves and carried forwards as before, the shore being very flat.

The last time of these two had well near been fatal to me; for the sea having hurried me along as before, landed me, or rather dashed me against a piece of rock, and that with such force, as it left me senseless, and indeed helpless, as to my own deliverance; for the blow taking my side and breast, beat the breath as it were quite out of my body; and had it returned again immediately, I must have been strangled in the water; but I recovered a little before the return of the waves, and seeing I should be covered again with the water, I resolved to hold fast by a piece of the rock, and so to hold my breath, if possible, till the wave went back; now as the waves were not so high as at first, being nearer land, I held my hold till the wave abated, and then fetched another run, which brought me so near the shore that the next wave, though it went over me, yet did not so swallow me up as to carry me away; and the next run I took, I got to the mainland, where, to my great comfort, I clambered up the cliffs of the shore and sat me down upon the grass, free from danger, and quite out of the reach of the water.

I was now landed, and safe on shore, and began to look up and thank God that my life was saved, in a case wherein there was some minutes before scarce any room to hope. I believe it is impossible to express to the life<sup>5</sup> what the ecstasies and transports of the soul are, when it is so saved, as I may say, out of the very grave; and I do not wonder now at that custom, viz. that when a malefactor, who has the halter about his neck, is tied up, and just going to be turned off,<sup>6</sup> and has a reprieve brought to him: I say, I do not wonder that they bring a surgeon with it, to let him bleed that very moment they tell him of it, that the surprise may not drive the animal spirits<sup>7</sup> from the heart, and overwhelm him:

*For sudden joys, like griefs, confound at first.*<sup>8</sup>

I walked about on the shore lifting up my hands, and my whole being, as I may say, wrapped up in the contemplation of my deliverance; making a thousand gestures and motions which I cannot describe; reflecting upon all my comrades that were drowned, and that there should not be one soul saved but myself; for, as for them, I never saw them afterwards, or any sign of them, except three of their hats, one cap, and two shoes that were not fellows.

I cast my eyes to the stranded vessel, when the breach and froth of the sea being so big, I could hardly see it, it lay so far off, and considered, Lord! how was it possible I could get on shore?

After I had solaced my mind with the comfortable part of my condition, I began to look round me to see what kind of place I was in, and what was next to be done; and I soon found my comforts abate, and that in a word I had a dreadful deliverance; for I was wet, had no clothes to shift me,<sup>9</sup> nor anything either to eat or drink to comfort me, neither did I see any prospect before me but that of perishing with hunger, or being devoured by wild beasts; and that which was particularly afflicting to me was that I had no weapon either to hunt and kill any creature for my sustenance, or to defend myself against any other creature that might desire to kill me for theirs. In a word, I had nothing about me but a knife, a tobacco-pipe, and a little tobacco in a box; this was all my provision; and this threw me into terrible agonies of mind, that for a while I run about like a madman. Night coming upon me, I began with a heavy heart to consider what would be my lot if there were any ravenous beasts in that country, seeing at night they always come abroad for their prey.

All the remedy that offered to my thoughts at that time was to get up into a thick bushy tree like a fir, but thorny, which grew near me, and where I resolved to set all night, and consider the next day what death I should die, for as yet I saw no prospect of life. I walked about a furlong<sup>1</sup> from the shore, to see if I could find any fresh water to drink, which I did, to my great joy; and having drank and put a

little tobacco into my mouth to prevent hunger, I went to the tree, and getting up into it, endeavored to place myself so, as that if I should sleep I might not fall; and having cut me a short stick, like a truncheon, for my defense, I took up my lodging, and having been excessively fatigued, I fell fast asleep, and slept as comfortably as, I believe, few could have done in my condition, and found myself more refreshed with it, than I think I ever was on such an occasion.

When I waked it was broad day, the weather clear, and the storm abated, so that the sea did not rage and swell as before. But that which surprised me most was that the ship was lifted off in the night from the sand where she lay, by the swelling of the tide, and was driven up almost as far as the rock which I at first mentioned, where I had been so bruised by the wave dashing me against it; this being within about a mile from the shore where I was, and the ship seeming to stand upright still, I wished myself on board, that at least I might save some necessary things for my use.

When I came down from my apartment in the tree, I looked about me again, and the first thing I found was the boat,<sup>2</sup> which lay as the wind and the sea had tossed her up upon the land, about two miles on my right hand. I walked as far as I could upon the shore to have got to her; but found a neck or inlet of water between me and the boat which was about half a mile broad; so I came back for the present, being more intent upon getting at the ship, where I hoped to find something for my present subsistence.

A little after noon I found the sea very calm, and the tide ebbed so far out, that I could come within a quarter of a mile of the ship; and here I found a fresh renewing of my grief; for I saw evidently, that if we had kept on board we had been all safe, that is to say, we had all got safe on shore, and I had not been so miserable as to be left entirely destitute of all comfort and company as I now was; this forced tears from my eyes again, but as there was little relief in that, I resolved, if possible, to get to the ship, so I pulled off my clothes, for the weather was hot to extremity, and took the water; but when I came to the ship, my difficulty was still greater to know how to get on board, for as she lay aground, and high out of the water, there



was nothing within my reach to lay hold of. I swam round her twice, and the second time I spied a small piece of rope, which I wondered I did not see at first, hang down by the fore-chains so low, as that with great difficulty I got hold of it, and by the help of that rope I got up into the fore-castle of the ship. Here I found that the ship was bulged,<sup>3</sup> and had a great deal of water in her hold, but that she lay so on the side of a bank of hard sand, or rather earth, that her stern lay lifted up upon the bank, and her head low almost to the water; by this means all her quarter<sup>4</sup> was free, and all that was in that part was dry; for you may be sure my first work was to search and to see what was spoiled and what was free; and first I found that all the ship's provisions were dry and untouched by the water, and being very well disposed to eat, I went to the bread room and filled my pockets with biscuit, and eat it as I went about other things, for I had no time to lose. I also found some rum in the great cabin, of which I took a large dram,<sup>5</sup> and which I had indeed need enough of to spirit me for what was before me. Now I wanted nothing but a boat to furnish myself with many things which I foresaw would be very necessary to me.

It was in vain to sit still and wish for what was not to be had, and this extremity roused my application; we had several spare yards, and two or three large spars<sup>6</sup> of wood, and a spare topmast or two in the ship; I resolved to fall to work with these, and I flung as many of them overboard as I could manage for their weight, tying every one with a rope that they might not drive away; when this was done I went down the ship's side, and pulling them to me, I tied four of them fast together at both ends as well as I could in the form of a raft, and laying two or three short pieces of plank upon them crossways, I found I could walk upon it very well, but that it was not able to bear any great weight, the pieces being too light; so I went to work, and with the carpenter's saw I cut a spare topmast into three lengths, and added them to my raft, with a great deal of labor and pains, but hope of furnishing myself with necessities encouraged me to go beyond what I should have been able to have done upon another occasion.

My raft was now strong enough to bear any reasonable weight; my next care was what to load it with, and how to preserve what I laid upon it from the surf of the sea; but I was not long considering this. I first laid all the plank or boards upon it that I could get, and having considered well what I most wanted, I first got three of the seamen's chests, which I had broken open and emptied, and lowered them down upon my raft; the first of these I filled with provision—viz. bread, rice, three Dutch cheeses, five pieces of dried goat's flesh which we lived much upon, and a little remainder of European corn,<sup>7</sup> which had been laid by for some fowls which we brought to sea with us, but the fowls were killed. There had been some barley and wheat together, but to my great disappointment, I found afterwards that the rats had eaten or spoiled it all. As for liquors, I found several cases of bottles belonging to our skipper, in which were some cordial waters, and in all about five or six gallons of rack.<sup>8</sup> These I stowed by themselves, there being no need to put hem into the chest, nor no room for them. While I was doing this, I found the tide began to flow, though very calm; and I had the mortification to see my coat, shirt, and waistcoat, which I had left on shore, upon the sand swim away. As for my breeches, which were only linen and open-kneed, I swam on board in them and my stockings. However this put me upon rummaging for clothes, of which I found enough, but took no more than I wanted for present use, for I had others things which my eye was more upon, as first tools to work with on shore, and it was after long searching that I found out the carpenter's chest, which was indeed a very useful prize to me, and much more valuable than a ship-loading of gold would have been at that time; I got it down to my raft, even whole as it was, without losing time to look into it, for I knew in general what it contained.

My next care was for some ammunition and arms; there were two very good fowling-pieces<sup>9</sup> in the great cabin, and two pistols. These I secured first, with some powder-horns, and a small bag of shot, and two old rusty swords. I knew there were three barrels of powder in the ship, but knew not where our gunner had stowed them; but with much search I found them, two of them dry and

good, the third had taken water; those two I got to my raft with the arms, and now I thought myself pretty well freighted, and began to think how I should get to shore with them, having neither sail, oar, or rudder, and the least capful of wind would have upset all my navigation.

I had three encouragements, 1. A smooth, calm sea, 2. The tide rising and setting in to the shore, 3. What little wind there was blew me towards the land. And thus, having found two or three broken oars belonging to the boat and besides the tools which were in the chest, I found two saws, an axe, and a hammer; and with this cargo I put to sea. For a mile or thereabouts my raft went very well, only that I found it drive a little distant from the place where I had landed before; by which I perceived that there was some indraft of the water, and consequently I hoped to find some creek or river there, which I might make use of as a port to get to land with my cargo.

As I imagined, so it was, there appeared before me a little opening of the land, and I found a strong current of the tide set into it; so I guided my raft as well as I could to keep in the middle of the stream. But here I had like to have suffered a second shipwreck, which, if I had, I think verily would have broken my heart, for knowing nothing of the coast, my raft run aground at one end of it upon a shoal, and not being aground at the other end, it wanted but<sup>1</sup> a little that all my cargo had slipped off towards the end that was afloat, and so fallen into the water. I did my utmost by setting my back against the chests, to keep them in their places, but could not thrust off the raft with all my strength, neither durst I stir from the posture I was in, but holding up the chests with all my might, stood in that manner near half an hour, in which time the rising of the water brought me a little more upon a level, and a little after, the water still rising, my raft floated again, and I thrust her off with the oar I had, into the channel, and then driving up higher, I at length found myself in the mouth of a little river, with land on both sides, and a strong current of tide running up. I looked on both sides for a proper place to get to shore, for I was not willing to be driven too



high up the river, hoping in time to see some ship at sea, and therefore resolved to place myself as near the coast as I could.

At length I spied a little cove on the right shore of the creek, to which with great pain and difficulty I guided my raft, and at last got so near as that, reaching ground with my oar, I could thrust her directly in. But here I had like to have dipped all my cargo in the sea again; for that shore lying pretty steep, that is to say sloping, there was no place to land, but where one end of my float, if it run on shore, would lie so high, and the other sink lower as before, that it would endanger my cargo again. All that I could do was to wait till the tide was at the highest, keeping the raft with my oar like an anchor to hold the side of it fast to the shore, near a flat piece of ground, which I expected the water would flow over; and so it did. As soon as I found water enough, for my raft drew about a foot water,<sup>2</sup> I thrust her on upon that flat piece of ground, and there fastened or moored her by sticking my two broken oars into the ground, one on one side near the one end, and one on the other side near the other end; and thus I lay till the water ebbed away, and left my raft and all my cargo safe on shore.

My next work was to view the country, and seek a proper place for my habitation, and where to stow my goods to secure them from whatever might happen; where I was I yet knew not, whether on the continent or on an island, whether inhabited or not inhabited, whether in danger of wild beasts or not. There was a hill not above a mile from me, which rose up very steep and high, and which seemed to overtop some other hills which lay as in a ridge from it northward. I took out one of the fowling pieces, and one of the pistols, and a horn of powder; and thus armed I travelled for discovery up to the top of that hill, where after I had with great labor and difficulty got to the top, I saw my fate to my great affliction, (viz.) that I was in an island environed every way with the sea, no land to be seen, except some rocks which lay a great way off; and two small islands less than this, which lay about three leagues<sup>3</sup> to the west.

I found also that the island I was in was barren, and, as I saw good reason to believe, uninhabited, except by wild beasts, of whom

however I saw none, yet I saw abundance of fowls, but knew not their kinds, neither when I killed them could I tell what was fit for food, and what not; at my coming back, I shot at a great bird which I saw sitting upon a tree on the side of a great wood. I believe it was the first gun that had been fired there since the creation of the world; I had no sooner fired, but from all parts of the wood there arose an innumerable number of fowls of many sorts, making a confused screaming, and crying every one according to his usual note, but not one of them of any kind that I knew. As for the creature I killed, I took it to be a kind of a hawk, its color and beak resembling it, but had no talons or claws more than common; its flesh was carrion, and fit for nothing.

Contented with this discovery, I came back to my raft, and fell to work to bring my cargo on shore, which took me up the rest of that day, and what to do with myself at night I knew not, nor indeed where to rest; for I was afraid to lie down on the ground, not knowing but some wild beast might devour me, though, as I afterwards found, there was really no need for those fears.

However, as well as I could, I barricaded myself round with the chests and boards that I had brought on shore, and made a kind of hut for that night's lodging; as for food, I yet saw not which way to supply myself, except that I had seen two or three creatures like hares run out of the wood where I shot the fowl.

I now began to consider, that I might yet get a great many things out of the ship, which would be useful to me, and particularly some of the rigging, and sails, and such other things as might come to land; and I resolved to make another voyage on board the vessel, if possible; and as I knew that the first storm that blew must necessarily break her all in pieces, I resolved to set all other things apart,<sup>4</sup> till I got everything out of the ship that I could get; then I called a council, that is to say, in my thoughts, whether I should take back the raft; but this appeared impracticable: so I resolved to go as before, when the tide was down; and I did so, only that I stripped before I went from my hut, having nothing on but a checkered shirt, a pair of linen drawers, and a pair of pumps<sup>5</sup> on my feet.

I got on board the ship, as before, and prepared a second raft; and having had experience of the first, I neither made this so unwieldy, nor loaded it so hard, but yet I brought away several things very useful to me; as first, in the carpenter's stores I found two or three bags full of nails and spikes, a great screw-jack, a dozen or two of hatchets, and above all, that most useful thing called a grindstone.<sup>6</sup> All these I secured together with several things belonging to the gunner, particularly two or three iron crows,<sup>7</sup> and two barrels of musket bullets, seven muskets, another fowling-piece, with some small quantity of powder more; a large bagful of small shot, and a great roll of sheet-lead. But this last was so heavy I could not hoise it up to get it over the ship's side.

Besides these things, I took all the men's clothes that I could find, and a spare fore-topsail, a hammock and some bedding; and with this I loaded my second raft, and brought them all safe on shore to my very great comfort.

I was under some apprehensions during my absence from the land, that at least my provisions might be devoured on shore: but when I came back, I found no sign of any visitor, only there sat a creature like a wild cat upon one of the chests, which when I came towards it, ran away a little distance, and then stood still; she sat very composed, and unconcerned, and looked full in my face, as if she had a mind to be acquainted with me. I presented<sup>8</sup> my gun at her, but as she did not understand it, she was perfectly unconcerned at it, nor did she offer to stir away; upon which I tossed her a bit of biscuit, though by the way I was not very free of it, for my store was not great: however, I spared her a bit, I say, and she went to it, smelled of it, and ate it, and looked (as pleased) for more, but I thanked her, and could spare no more; so she marched off.

Having got my second cargo on shore, though I was fain to open the barrels of powder, and bring them by parcels, for they were too heavy, being large casks, I went to work to make me a little tent with the sail and some poles which I cut for that purpose, and into this tent I brought everything that I knew would spoil, either with rain or sun, and I piled all the empty chests and casks up in a circle round

the tent, to fortify it from any sudden attempt, either from man or beast.

When I had done this I blocked up the door of the tent with some boards within, and an empty chest set up on end without, and spreading one of the beds upon the ground, laying my two pistols just at my head, and my gun at length by me, I went to bed for the first time, and slept very quietly all night, for I was very weary and heavy, for the night before I had slept little, and had labored very hard all day, as well to fetch all those things from the ship, as to get them on shore.

I had the biggest magazine<sup>9</sup> of all kinds now that ever were laid up, I believe, for one man: but I was not satisfied still; for while the ship sat upright in that posture, I thought I ought to get everything out of her that I could; so every day at low water I went on board, and brought away something or other; but particularly the third time I went, I brought away as much of the rigging as I could, as also all the small ropes and rope-twine I could get, with a piece of spare canvas, which was to mend the sails upon occasion,<sup>1</sup> and the barrel of wet gunpowder. In a word, I brought away all the sails first and last, only that I was fain to cut them in pieces, and bring as much at a time as I could, for they were no more useful to be sails, but as mere canvas only.

But that which comforted me more still was that last of all, after I had made five or six such voyages as these, and thought I had nothing more to expect from the ship that was worth my meddling with, I say, after all this, I found a great hogshead of bread, three large runlets<sup>2</sup> of rum or spirits, a box of sugar, and a barrel of fine flour; this was surprising to me, because I had given over expecting any more provisions, except what was spoiled by the water. I soon emptied the hogshead of that bread, and wrapped it up parcel by parcel in pieces of the sails, which I cut out; and, in a word, I got all this safe on shore also.

The next day I made another voyage; and now having plundered the ship of what was portable and fit to hand out, I began with the cables; and cutting the great cable into pieces, such as I could move,

I got two cables and a hawser on shore, with all the ironwork I could get; and having cut down the spritsail-yard, and the mizzen-yard,<sup>3</sup> and everything I could to make a large raft, I loaded it with all those heavy goods, and came away; but my good luck began now to leave me; for this raft was so unwieldy, and so overladen, that after I was entered the little cove, where I had landed the rest of my goods, not being able to guide it so handily as I did the other, it overset, and threw me and all my cargo into the water; as for myself, it was no great harm, for I was near the shore; but as to my cargo, it was a great part of it lost, especially the iron, which I expected would have been of great use to me; however, when the tide was out, I got most of the pieces of the cable ashore, and some of the iron, though with infinite labor; for I was fain to dip<sup>4</sup> for it into the water, a work which fatigued me very much. After this, I went every day on board, and brought away what I could get.

I had been now thirteen days on shore, and had been eleven times on board the ship; in which time I had brought away all that one pair of hands could well be supposed capable to bring, though I believe verily, had the calm weather held, I should have brought away the whole ship piece by piece. But preparing the twelfth time to go on board, I found the wind begin to rise: however, at low water I went on board, and though I thought I had rummaged the cabin so effectually as that nothing more could be found, yet I discovered a locker with drawers in it, in one of which I found two or three razors, and one pair of large scissors, with some ten or a dozen of good knives and forks: in another I found about thirty-six pounds value in money, some European coin, some Brazil, some pieces of eight, some gold, some silver.

I smiled to myself at the sight of this money. "O drug!" said I aloud, "what art thou good for? Thou art not worth to me, no not the taking off of the ground, one of those knives is worth all this heap, I have no manner of use for thee, e'en remain where thou art, and go to the bottom as a creature whose life is not worth saving." However upon second thoughts, I took it away; and wrapping all this in a piece of canvas, I began to think of making another raft, but while I

was preparing this, I found the sky overcast, and the wind began to rise, and in a quarter of an hour it blew a fresh gale from the shore; it presently occurred to me that it was in vain to pretend<sup>5</sup> to make a raft with the wind off shore, and that it was my business to be gone before the tide of flood began, otherwise I might not be able to reach the shore at all. Accordingly I let myself down into the water, and swam across the channel, which lay between the ship and the sands, and even that with difficulty enough, partly with the weight of the things I had about me, and partly the roughness of the water, for the wind rose very hastily, and before it was quite high water, it blew a storm.

But I was gotten home to my little tent, where I lay with all my wealth about me very secure. It blew very hard all that night, and in the morning when I looked out, behold no more ship was to be seen; I was a little surprised, but recovered myself with the satisfactory reflection, viz. that I had lost no time, nor abated no diligence to get everything out of her that could be useful to me, and that indeed there was little left in her that I was able to bring away if I had had more time.

I now gave over any more thoughts of the ship, or of anything out of her, except what might drive on shore from her wreck, as indeed divers pieces of her afterwards did; but those things were of small use to me.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1719

- Note 1: The complete title on the title page runs, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner, Who Lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an uninhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke [the Orinoco, which runs mostly through present-day Venezuela]; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An*

*Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pirates.*[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Read quickly. From the third (1719) edition on, the word used is *disputed*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Near the beginning of the novel, a ferocious storm runs the ship on which Crusoe is a crew member onto a sandbar, and he and ten others desperately escape in a lifeboat, which is soon swamped by a huge wave. The selection reprinted here begins at this moment.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The body of land that is the island.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In an accurately vivid way.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hanged.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Vital principle animating the body. "Let him blood": open a vein to discharge his blood.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: From Robert Wild, *Poetica Licentia, A Gratulatory Poem upon His Majesties Gracious Declaration for Liberty of Conscience, with a Friendly Debate betwixt Con and Non* (1672).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: To allow me to change out of my wet ones.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A furlong is 220 yards.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The lifeboat in which Crusoe and the other crew members left the ship.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fractured in the hull.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Upper part of the side of a ship behind the center beam, where the ship is broadest. "Stern": the ship's rear. "Head": front of the ship.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A swallow, a swig.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Lengths of wood used for masts, booms, etc., on a ship. "Yards": comparatively slender spars.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Generic term for grain.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Arrack, "a spirituous liquor imported from the East Indies, used by way of dram and in punch" (Johnson's *Dictionary*). "Cordial waters": alcoholic drinks for medicinal purposes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Light shotguns for hunting fowl.[Return to reference 9](#)



- Note 1: It would have taken only.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Required about a foot of water to float.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A league is about three miles.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Put everything else aside.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Low-heeled shoes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A stone disk on an axle, for grinding and sharpening. "Screw-jack": a jack, for lifting heavy objects.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Crowbars.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Pointed.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Store of goods.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: When necessary.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Casks. "Hogshead": large cask.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The yards are wood pieces that support different sails.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Dive.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Attempt.[Return to reference 5](#)



# ***From The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe***

## ***The Preface***

The success the former part of this work has met with in the world has yet been no other than is acknowledged to be due to the surprising variety of the subject, and to the agreeable manner of the performance.

All the endeavors of envious people to reproach it with being a romance,<sup>1</sup> to search it for errors in geography, inconsistency in the relation, and contradictions in the fact, have proved abortive, and as impotent as malicious.

The just application of every incident, the religious and useful inferences drawn from every part, are so many testimonies to the good design of making it public, and must legitimate all the part that may be called invention, or parable in the story.

The second part, if the editor's opinion may pass, is (contrary to the usage of <sup>2</sup> second parts) every way as entertaining as the first, contains as strange and surprising incidents, and as great a variety of them; nor is the application less serious, or suitable; and doubtless will, to the sober, as well as ingenious reader, be every way as profitable and diverting: and this makes the abridging this work as scandalous as it is knavish and ridiculous,<sup>3</sup> seeing, while to shorten the book, that they may seem to reduce the value, they strip it of all those reflections, as well religious as moral, which are not only the greatest beauties of the work, but are calculated for the infinite advantage of the reader.

By this they leave the work naked of its brightest ornaments; and if they would at the same time pretend that the author has supplied the story out of his invention, they take from it the improvement, which alone recommends that invention to wise and good men.

The injury these men do to the proprietor of this work is a practice all honest men abhor; and he believes he may challenge them to show the difference between that and robbing on the highway, or breaking open a house.

If they can't show any difference in the crime, they will find it hard to show why there should be any difference in the punishment: And he will answer for it, that nothing shall be wanting on his part, to do them justice.

## Endnotes

1719

- Note 1: A fanciful, fictional tale.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: What is usual with. "The second part": the current volume, *The Farther Adventures*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Abridgements of *The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* appeared the year it was published and were a flourishing enterprise throughout the remainder of the century.[Return to reference 3](#)

## MARY DAVYS

Mary Davys (1674–1732) was born in Ireland and married a Dublin clergyman, a college friend of Jonathan Swift. Her husband died after just four years of marriage; their first daughter died before, their second just after him. Nearly destitute, she moved to London in 1700, published two works of fiction, then moved to York. Her play *The Northern Heiress* was staged there in 1715, and in London the next year. It earned money enough for her to open a coffeehouse in Cambridge in 1718, where she lived the rest of her life. Her best fiction, which displays her talent for deft plotting, colorful, concrete dialogue, and humorous situations, appeared in the 1720s. *The Reform'd Coquet* (1725), a comic novel about a vain young woman who learns to value the right man, sold well enough to inspire the publication of *The Works of Mary Davys* (also 1725), which contained plays, poems, and fiction. Her final novel, *The Accomplish'd Rake* (1727), takes a satirical view of the dissolute ways of fashionable London life. The preface to her *Works* offers an important perspective on both the theory and the practice of novel writing. She defines novels as “probable feigned stories,” noting their decline in sales compared to histories and travels—perhaps thinking, among other works, of the success of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which would not commonly be called a novel until decades later. She also reflects on her tough literary career, as “a woman left to her own endeavors for twenty-seven years together,” battling back against undeserved censures for bawdiness. (Late in her life, in 1731, the *Grub-Street Journal* published another such attack, and again she replied, “the novels may e’ne fight their own battles . . . they are too unfashionable to have one word of bawdy in them, the readers are the best judges and to them I appeal.”) Though literary historians now recognize how the success of Davys and other women writers of her time shaped the history of the novel, her story reminds us it never came easy.

# ***From The Works of Mary Davys***

## ***The Preface***

'Tis now for some time that those sort of writings called novels have been a great deal out of use and fashion, and that the ladies (for whose service they were chiefly designed) have been taken up with amusements of more use and improvement: I mean history and travels: with which the relation of probable feigned stories can by no means stand in competition. However, these are not without their advantages, and those considerable too; and it is very likely the chief reason that put them out of vogue was the world's being surfeited with such as were either flat and insipid, or offensive to modesty and good manners; or that they found them only a circle or repetition of the same adventures.

The French, who have dealt most in this kind, have, I think, chiefly contributed to put them out of countenance:<sup>1</sup> who, though upon all occasions, and where they pretend to write true history, give themselves the utmost liberty of feigning, are too tedious and dry in their matter, and so impertinent in their harangues, that the readers can hardly keep themselves awake over them. I have read a French novel of four hundred pages without the least variety of events, or any issue<sup>2</sup> in the conclusion, either to please or amuse the reader, yet all fiction and romance; and the commonest matters of fact, truly told, would have been much more entertaining. Now this is to lose the only advantage of invention, which gives us room to order accidents<sup>3</sup> better than fortune will be at the pains to do; so to work upon the reader's passions, sometimes keep him in suspense between fear and hope, and at last send him satisfied away. This I have endeavored to do in the following sheets.<sup>4</sup> I have in every novel proposed one entire scheme or plot, and the other adventures are only incident or collateral to it; which is the great

rule prescribed by the critics, not only in tragedy, and other heroic poems, but in comedy too. The adventures, as far as I could order them, are wonderful<sup>5</sup> and probable; and I have with the utmost justice rewarded virtue, and punished vice. *The Lady's Tale* was writ in the year 1700, and was the effect of my first flight to the muses, it was sent about the world as naked as it came into it, having not so much as one page of preface to keep it in countenance.<sup>6</sup> What success it met with, I never knew; for as some unnatural parents sell their offspring to beggars, in order to see them no more, I took three guineas for the brat of my brain, and then went a hundred and fifty miles northward,<sup>7</sup> to which place it was not very likely its fame should follow. But meeting with it some time ago, I found it in a sad ragged condition, and had so much pity for it, as to take it home, and get it into better clothes, that when it made a second sally,<sup>8</sup> it might with more assurance appear before its betters.

My whole design both in that and *The Cousins*<sup>9</sup> is to endeavor to restore the purity and empire of love, and correct the vile abuses of it; which, could I do, it would be an important service to the public: for since passions will ever have a place in the actions of men, and love a principal one, what cannot be removed or subdued ought at least to be regulated; and if the reformation would once begin from our sex, the men would follow it in spite of their hearts; for it is we have given up our empire, betrayed by rebels among ourselves.

The two plays I leave to fight their own battles; and I shall say no more than that I never was so vain as to think they deserved a place in the first rank, or so humble as to resign them to the last.

I have been so anxious for the credit of my *Modern Poet*<sup>1</sup> that I showed it to several of my friends, and earnestly begged their impartial opinion of it. Every one separately told me his objection, but not two among them agreed in any one particular; so that I found, to remove all the faults, would be to leave nothing behind, and I could not help thinking my case parallel with the man in the fable, whose two wives disliking, one his gray hairs, and the other his black, picked both out, till they left him nothing but a bald pate.

Perhaps it may be objected against me, by some more ready to give reproach than relief, that as I am the relict of a clergyman, and in years,<sup>2</sup> I ought not to publish plays, &c. But I beg of such to suspend their uncharitable opinions, till they have read what I have writ, and if they find anything there offensive either to God or Man, anything either to shock their morals or their modesty, 'tis then time enough to blame. And let them farther consider, that a woman left to her own endeavors for twenty-seven years together, may well be allowed to catch at any opportunity for that bread, which they that condemn her would very probably deny to give her.

## Endnotes

1725

- Note 1: Make them unpopular.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Outcome.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Incidents in a story.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pages.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Full of wonders.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: To give it support.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Davys moved to York from London in 1704.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: When published a second time, in this edition.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Another short novel in volume 2 of Davys' *Works*.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A long poem in couplets that concludes volume 1 of Davys' *Works*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Davys was fifty-one when she published her works. "Relict": widow.[Return to reference 2](#)

## ELIZA HAYWOOD

The immensely prolific Eliza Haywood (1693?–1756; see [p. 649](#)) wrote all sorts of prose: from racy romance and “oriental” tales to her later, more moralizing didactic fictions. *The Fortunate Foundlings* appeared in 1744, with a subtitle that associated it with the genre of secret history: *Being the Genuine History of Colonel M—rs, and his Sister, Madam Du P—y, the Issue of the Hon. Ch—es M—rs, Son of the late Duke of R—l—d. Containing many wonderful accidents that befell them in their travels, and interspersed with the characters and adventures of several persons of condition, in the most polite courts in Europe*. In the period, the thriving genre of secret history could contain true facts, thinly veiled political allegories, or fictions with no real-world referents. These texts promised glimpses of how powerful people really lived and of what Haywood elsewhere describes as “the secret springs which gave rise to the actions” that happened in the world—though part of the pleasure could also be in how unbelievable it all was. Poised at this blurry intersection between truth and fiction, secret histories could engage in scandalous gossip and political satire, while also offering thrilling invented adventures.

Haywood’s preface purports to be from “EDITORS” who have merely compiled true accounts, and it promises that the text both provides “amusement” and “encourage[s] virtue.”

# ***From The Fortunate Foundlings***

## ***Preface***

The many fictions which have been lately imposed upon the world, under the specious titles of *secret histories*, *memoirs*, etc., etc., have given but too much room to question the veracity of every thing that has the least tendency that way: we therefore think it highly necessary to assure the reader, that he will find nothing in the following sheets, but what has been collected from original letters, private memorandums, and the accounts we have been favored with from the mouths of persons too deeply concerned in many of the chief transactions not to be perfectly acquainted with the truth, and of too much honor and integrity to put any false colors upon it.

The adventures are not so long passed as to be wholly forgotten by many living witnesses, nor yet so recent as to give any reason to suspect us of flattery in the relation given of them, the motive of their publication being only to encourage virtue in both sexes, by showing the amiableness<sup>1</sup> of it in real characters. And if it be true (as certainly it is) that example has far more efficacy than precept, we may be bold to say that there are few fairer, or more worthy imitation.—The sons and daughters of the greatest families may give additional luster to their nobility, by forming themselves on the model here presented to them; and those of lower extraction,<sup>2</sup> attain qualities to atone for what they want in birth:—so that we flatter ourselves this undertaking will not fail of receiving the approbation of all who wish well to a reformation of manners, and more especially those who have youth under their care.—As for such who may take it up merely as an amusement, it is possible they will find something, which, by interesting their affections, may make them better without designing to be so.—Either way will full recompense the pains taken in the compiling by

THE EDITORS



## Endnotes

- Note 1: “Loveliness; power of raising love” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Social status.[Return to reference 2](#)

## HENRY FIELDING

Writing novels was a second literary career for Henry Fielding (1707–1754), who first became famous as the preeminent comic playwright of his time. The need to make money motivated both. He was from a family with high social connections, a relation of earls and second cousin to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and he received a classical education at England's most elite school, Eton, forming friendships with the nation's future leaders. But his prodigal father, an army colonel who would rise to the rank of general, squandered the fortune that Henry needed to live the life of a gentleman he thought he deserved. Early on, Fielding determined on a career as a writer to maintain this life, seeing his first comedy staged in London when he was twenty. After some time studying literature at the University of Leiden in Holland, he returned to England and wrote for the theater, specializing in farces, ballad operas, and political satires. These last were so successful that the ministry of Robert Walpole passed the Stage Licensing Act of 1737, which subjected all new plays to government censorship and closed the Haymarket Theatre, where Fielding's plays were produced, effectively ending his theatrical career. He studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1740.

That year also he aimed his talent for parody at the greatest sensation in fiction of the day, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson. Fielding's *Shamela* makes fun of that novel's epistolary style and of its heroine's way of using her chastity to her advantage. He extends the joke in his next fictional work, *Joseph Andrews* (1742), which follows Pamela's brother, a footman employed by a lady who attempts to seduce him. But Fielding now aspired to be much more than a parodist of Richardson, acknowledging Cervantes' great *Don Quixote* (1605, 1616) as a model even as he remarks in the preface on his own originality. Seven years later, he asserted this claim yet more strongly in his masterpiece *Tom Jones* (1749), in which he declares himself

“founder of a new province of writing.” He concluded his novelistic career with *Amelia* (1751), which disappointed some readers as it indulged sentiments reminiscent of Richardson’s own idiom. (One wit in response advertised a nonexistent novel called *Shamelia*.)

Despite his initial contempt, Fielding had sent Richardson a letter warm with praise for *Clarissa*: “beyond any thing I have ever read,” he said of one affecting part. Though gratified, Richardson remained hostile and would never miss a chance to deplore the bad morals of *Tom Jones*. From their rivalry, a multilayered contrast arose in commentary on novelistic fiction that strongly influenced later understandings of the form’s possibilities. Richardson’s excellences—his moral, psychological, and emotional intensity, his preference for feminine protagonists and intimate domestic settings, his orchestration of narrative through the first-person voices of correspondents—seemed incompatible with Fielding’s strengths: a comic vigor and well-populated plots that open out into the countryside and twist through chaotic scenes at public inns, overseen in the third person by an ironic, sociable author-narrator who smiles at the lapses of basically good-hearted heroes.

The preface to *Joseph Andrews* asserts not only the novelty of Fielding’s fictional enterprise but also its potential as high literary art. Fielding notices its deep connection to ancient and exalted literary forms, comedy and epic. His techniques also compare, he says, with those of his friend, “the comic history painter” William Hogarth, whose art represents the ridiculous in human nature without falling into unrealistic exaggeration and caricature. The theory of the ridiculous in the preface considers not only the undistorted representation of fictional characters but also realities of human motivation and morality. Fielding’s intent here to tell the reader what to think about his work will enter the body of this and his other novels, as his narrator points out details of the plot, moralizes on his characters’ behavior, and theorizes on the nature of fiction. In *Joseph Andrews*, he will depict the vicissitudes that finally bring the hero Joseph, virtuous but warmly in love with a young woman of his own social station, Fanny Goodwill, to a happy end. The resolution of

the plot, which includes Joseph's discovery of his true identity, employs some conventions of romance; and the preface applies that term to *Joseph Andrews* without embarrassment, though it contrasts this novel with the vast French prose romances of the seventeenth century. Fielding seems most taken with his creation of Parson Abraham Adams, who accompanies Joseph and Fanny on their adventures and sponsors their match—a character the likes of whom, Fielding says, is “not to be found in any book now extant.” Readers have concurred with this sense of Adams's uniqueness, a result of his pleasing (if at times maddening and puzzling) power to elicit both ridicule and affection. The success of Adams as a literary creation points to a feature typical of novels in the future: their construction of what the twentieth-century novelist E. M. Forster would call “round” characters. Instead of presenting simplifications of human beings, novels introduce characters that seem to breathe, feel, and think. Fielding's power to raise affection for such characters while also comprehensively surveying an entire social world lies at the heart of his achievement.

# ***From The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews***<sup>1</sup>

## **From *Preface***

As it is possible the mere English reader may have a different idea of romance with the author of these little volumes,<sup>2</sup> and may consequently expect a kind of entertainment not to be found, nor which was even intended, in the following pages, it may not be improper to premise a few words concerning this kind of writing, which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our language.

The epic as well as the drama is divided into tragedy and comedy. Homer, who was the father of this species of poetry, gave us a pattern of both these, though that of the latter kind is entirely lost; which Aristotle tells us bore the same relation to comedy which his *Iliad* bears to tragedy.<sup>3</sup> And perhaps, that we have no more instances of it among the writers of antiquity, is owing to the loss of this great pattern, which, had it survived, would have found its imitators equally with the other poems of this great original.

And farther, as this poetry may be tragic or comic, I will not scruple to say it may be likewise either in verse or prose: for though it wants one particular, which the critic<sup>4</sup> enumerates in the constituent parts of an epic poem, namely meter; yet, when any kind of writing contains all its other parts, such as fable, action, characters, sentiments, and diction,<sup>5</sup> and is deficient in meter only; it seems, I think, reasonable to refer it to the epic; at least, as no critic hath thought proper to range it under any other head, or to assign it a particular name to itself.

Thus the *Telemachus* of the archbishop of Cambray appears to me of the epic kind, as well as<sup>6</sup> the *Odyssey* of Homer; indeed, it is

much fairer and more reasonable to give it a name common with that species from which it differs only in a single instance, than to confound it with those which it resembles in no other. Such are those voluminous works, commonly called romances, namely, *Clelia*, *Cleopatra*, *Astraea*, *Cassandra*, the *Grand Cyrus*,<sup>7</sup> and innumerable others, which contain, as I apprehend, very little instruction or entertainment.

Now a comic romance is a comic epic-poem in prose; differing from comedy, as the serious epic from tragedy: its action being more extended and comprehensive; containing a much larger circle of incidents, and introducing a greater variety of characters. It differs from the serious romance in its fable and action, in this: that as in the one these are grave and solemn, so in the other they are light and ridiculous: it differs in its characters by introducing persons of inferior rank, and consequently of inferior manners, whereas the grave romance sets the highest before us: lastly in its sentiments and diction; by preserving the ludicrous instead of the sublime.<sup>8</sup> In the diction, I think, burlesque<sup>9</sup> itself may be sometimes admitted; of which many instances will occur in this work, as in the description of the battles, and some other places, not necessary to be pointed out to the classical reader, for whose entertainment those parodies or burlesque imitations are chiefly calculated.

But though we have sometimes admitted this in our diction, we have carefully excluded it from our sentiments and characters; for there it is never properly introduced, unless in writings of the burlesque kind, which this is not intended to be. Indeed, no two species of writing can differ more widely than the comic and the burlesque; for as the latter is ever the exhibition of what is monstrous and unnatural, and where our delight, if we examine it, arises from the surprising absurdity, as in appropriating the manners of the highest to the lowest, or *è converso*,<sup>1</sup> so in the former we should ever confine ourselves strictly to nature, from the just imitation of which will flow all the pleasure we can this way convey to a sensible reader. And perhaps there is one reason why a comic writer should of all others be the least excused for deviating from

nature, since it may not be always so easy for a serious poet to meet with the great and the admirable; but life everywhere furnishes an accurate observer with the ridiculous.

I have hinted this little concerning burlesque; because I have often heard that name given to performances which have been truly of the comic kind, from the author's having sometimes admitted it in his diction only; which, as it is the dress of poetry, doth like the dress of men establish characters (the one of the whole poem, and the other of the whole man) in vulgar opinion, beyond any of their greater excellencies. But surely a certain drollery in style, where the characters and sentiments are perfectly natural, no more constitutes the burlesque, than an empty pomp and dignity of words, where everything else is mean and low, can entitle any performance to the appellation of the true sublime.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1742

- Note 1: The entire title on the title page runs, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and his Friend, Mr. Abraham Adams, Written in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *Joseph Andrews* was originally published to two duodecimo (small) volumes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the *Poetics* (ca. 335 B.C.E.), Aristotle mentions a comic mock-epic of Homer's, the *Margites*, which is now lost.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Aristotle. "Wants": lacks.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Epic poetry shares this list of elements with tragedy, according to Aristotle. "Fable": story, plot. "Sentiments": thoughts.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Just as much as. François de Salignac de Mothe Fénelon (1651–1715) published the prose epic *Telemachus* in French in 1699.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: All popular, multivolume French romances of the 17th century. Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701) wrote *Clélie* (1654–60) and *Artamène, ou le Grand Cyrus* (1647–58). Gautier de Costes de la Calprenède (ca. 1610–1663) wrote *Cléopâtre* (1647–58) and *Cassandre* (1642–45). Honoré d'Urfé (1567–1625) wrote *L'Astrée* (1607–27). [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lofty ideas and language. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Comically exaggerated imitation. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: To the contrary (Latin); that is, vice versa. [Return to reference 1](#)



## SAMUEL RICHARDSON

The novels of Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) emerged not from a genteel literary world of elite education and social privilege but from a London culture of printing presses, paper, type, and ink.

Richardson came to his position as one of the two most celebrated masters of eighteenth-century fiction with (in his words) “only common school-learning,” without Latin or Greek, starting in the book trades as a printer’s apprentice in London. He held that position for seven years, then worked for his former master as a compositor and corrector, and finally in 1722 gained the livery of the Stationer’s Company, the guild of London printers, that licensed him to set up his own printing business, at the age of thirty-three.

Through the 1720s and 1730s this business thrived, as he printed documents for the government, periodicals, and many kinds of books and also did work as an editor, a bookseller, and occasionally an author.

In 1739 he was composing a book of sample letters to serve as models for correspondence when one pair of them, an exchange about a master’s violent sexual harassment of a servant girl, sparked an idea. In two months, he wrote his first novel, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740)—published, like all the miscellaneous work he had previously written, anonymously (though his authorship soon became known). In a 1741 letter, he would describe it as representing a “new species of writing” that did not traffic in “the improbable and marvelous, with which novels general abound.”

*Pamela* elaborated on the situation in the letter manual and was itself an epistolary novel, composed entirely in letters, mostly written by the servant, Pamela Andrews, to her parents. She is “rewarded” near the end with a proposal of marriage from her finally reformed master Mr. B, which she accepts. The novel was a vast success, running to five editions in a year, inspiring rapturous praise and censures of its erotic content and disruption of social hierarchy, as

well as continuations by other writers, theatrical adaptations, prints and other visual representations, and parodies, notably Henry Fielding's *Shamela* (1740) and Eliza Haywood's *Anti-Pamela* (1741). Richardson himself wrote a sequel in 1741, but his greatest achievement as a novelist would appear in 1747 and 1748, in seven volumes: *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*, also composed of letters, nearly a million words long, follows the trials of Clarissa Harlowe, young, pious, rich, and beautiful, whose family cruelly forces her toward a financially advantageous marriage to an odious man. Clarissa is deceived into accepting the aid of a handsome libertine of high station, Lovelace, her great antagonist, bent on possessing and destroying her. Richardson's final novel, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54) portrays a truly good man, as an antidote to the specious appeal of men such as his own villain Lovelace and Fielding's comical hero Tom Jones, whom he thought far from harmless. Also notably prolix (seven volumes long) and also an epistolary novel, *Grandison* has not lived in readers' imaginations quite as *Pamela* and *Clarissa* have done, though its portrayal of intimate rhythms of domestic life captivated later masters of fiction such as Jane Austen.

Richardson did not invent epistolary fiction—Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* (three volumes, 1684–87) is a substantial earlier example—but his works did more for the prestige of the form in European literature than those of any other author. A skeptical reader such as Henry Fielding can find aspects of the epistolary form that strain credulity. How do the authors of so very many letters find time to live the lives they so copiously write about? Where are these letters, who has them, and how did this “editor” get them from correspondents who are estranged or widely distant from each other, or dead? Yet the documentary illusion of the form, its consisting of “real” physical objects—actual letters—that may not only be read but also hidden, stolen, passed secretly from hand to hand, helps overcome its artificiality, both for eighteenth-century readers used to sharing their own (often voluminous) correspondence, and readers now.

In Richardson's preface to *Clarissa*, posing as the editor who has overseen the letters' transformation from handwriting to print, he describes the technique's power, its way of depicting characters' emotions at the very moment they write, in the midst of the plot, not knowing the outcome. This close scrutiny of the motions of consciousness would be seen as a hallmark of the novel form in general. But epistolary fiction, Richardson knew, had its dangers. Giving ample space to self-justifying, plausible villains such as Lovelace, without authorial correction, could trap readers in the wrong sympathies. Before the final volumes of *Clarissa* had appeared, Richardson's devotees urged him to reform Lovelace for a happy ending; he felt they missed the point. The preface printed here, from the third, 1751 edition, testifies to his anxiety about controlling readers' wayward reactions. As editor, he "restores" (in fact invents) more epistolary material to this third edition, making the novel yet longer, much of which serves to discredit Lovelace further. The preface also addresses mundane problems that Richardson the printer knew mattered: the size of the type, the "spoilers" in the previous edition's outline. The epistolary form that Richardson mastered did not immediately take off; it came into greatest vogue in the 1770s (when Frances Burney's *Evelina* appeared) and 1780s, when the French author Pierre Choderlos de Laclos published his epistolary classic *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782). Though only occasionally revived in later fiction, the epistolary method allowed Richardson to create an intimacy between characters and the reader that remains at the heart of the novel's power.

# ***From Clarissa***<sup>1</sup>

## ***From Preface***

The following history is given in a series of letters written principally in a double yet separate correspondence;

Between two young ladies of virtue and honor, bearing an inviolable friendship for each other, and writing not merely for amusement, but upon the most *interesting*<sup>2</sup> subjects; in which every private family, more or less, may find itself concerned; and,

Between two gentlemen<sup>3</sup> of free lives; one of them glorying in his talents for stratagem and invention, and communicating to the other, in confidence, all the secret purposes of an intriguing head and resolute heart.

But here it will be proper to observe, for the sake of such as may apprehend hurt to the morals of youth, from the more freely written letters, that the gentlemen, though professed libertines as to the female sex, and making it one of their wicked maxims, to keep no faith with any of the individuals of it, who are thrown into their power, are not, however, either infidels or scoffers;<sup>4</sup> nor yet such as think themselves freed from the observance of those other moral duties which bind man to man.

On the contrary, it will be found, in the progress of the work, that they very often make such reflections upon each other, and each upon himself and his own actions, as reasonable beings *must* make, who disbelieve not a future state of rewards and punishments,<sup>5</sup> and who one day propose to reform—One of them actually reforming,<sup>6</sup> and by that means giving an opportunity to censure the freedoms which fall from the gayer pen and lighter heart of the other.

And yet that other, although in unbosoming himself to a select friend, he discovers<sup>7</sup> wickedness enough to entitle him to general detestation, preserves a decency, as well in his images as in his

language, which is not always to be found in the works of some of the most celebrated modern writers, whose subjects and characters have less warranted the liberties they have taken.

In the letters of the two young ladies, it is presumed will be found not only the highest exercise of a reasonable and *practicable* friendship, between minds endowed with the noblest principles of virtue and religion, but occasionally interspersed, such delicacy of sentiments, particularly with regard to the other sex; such instances of impartiality, each freely, as a fundamental principle of their friendship, blaming, praising, and setting right the other, as are strongly to be recommended to the observation of the *younger* part (more especially) of the female readers.

The principal of these two young ladies is proposed as an exemplar to her sex. Nor is it any objection to her being so, that she is not in all respects a perfect character. It was not only natural, but it was necessary, that she should have some faults, were it only to show the reader how laudably she could mistrust and blame herself, and carry to her own heart, divested of self-partiality, the censure which arose from her own convictions, and that even to the acquittal of those, because revered characters,<sup>8</sup> whom no one else would acquit, and to whose much greater faults her errors were owing, and not to a weak or reproachable heart. As far as it is consistent with human frailty, and as far as she could be perfect, considering the people she had to deal with, and those with whom she was inseparably connected, she *is* perfect. To have been impeccable must have left nothing for the divine grace and a purified state to do, and carried our idea of her from woman to angel. As such is she often esteemed by the man<sup>9</sup> whose *heart* was so corrupt that he could hardly believe human nature capable of the purity, which, on every trial or temptation, shone out in *hers*.

Besides the four principal persons, several others are introduced, whose letters are characteristic:<sup>1</sup> and it is presumed that there will be found in some of them, but more especially in those of the chief character among the men, and the second character among the

women,<sup>2</sup> such strokes of gayety, fancy, and humor, as will entertain and divert; and at the same time both warn and instruct.

All the letters are written while the hearts of the writers must be supposed to be wholly engaged in their subjects (the events at the time generally dubious<sup>3</sup>): so that they abound not only with critical situations, but with what may be called *instantaneous* descriptions and reflections (proper to be brought home to the breast of the youthful reader); as also with affecting conversations; many of them written in the dialogue or dramatic way.

"*Much more* lively and affecting," says one of the principal characters (Vol. VII, p. 73),<sup>4</sup> "must be the style of those who write in the height of a *present* distress; the mind tortured by the pangs of uncertainty (the events then hidden in the womb of fate;) *than* the dry, narrative, unanimated style of a person relating difficulties and dangers surmounted, can be; the relater perfectly at ease; and if himself unmoved by his own story, not likely greatly to affect the reader."

What will be found to be more particularly aimed at in the following work is—To warn the inconsiderate and thoughtless of the one sex, against the base arts and designs of specious contrivers of the other—To caution parents against the undue exercise of their natural authority over their children in the great article of marriage—To warn children against preferring a man of pleasure to a man of probity, upon that dangerous but too commonly received notion, *that a reformed rake makes the best husband*—But above all, to investigate the highest and most important doctrines not only of morality, but of Christianity, by showing them thrown into action in the conduct of the *worthy* characters; while the *unworthy*, who set those doctrines at defiance, are condignly, and, as may be said, consequentially punished.

From what has been said, considerate readers will not enter upon the perusal of the piece before them as if it were designed *only* to divert and amuse. It will probably be thought tedious to all such as *dip* into it, expecting a *light novel*, or *transitory romance*; and look

upon story in it (interesting as that is generally allowed to be) as its *sole end*, rather than as a vehicle to the instruction.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1747–48, 1751

- Note 1: The title page of the first edition reads *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady: Comprehending the Most Important Concerns of Private Life and Particularly Shewing, the Distresses that May Attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children, in Relation to Marriage. Published by the Editor of Pamela.* (The text of the preface here is from the third edition.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Touching, involving. “Two young ladies”: Clarissa Harlowe, the heroine of the novel, and her confidante, Anna Howe.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Robert Lovelace, the novel’s villain obsessed with seducing Clarissa, and his friend and fellow libertine, John Belford.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: At religion or morality.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Heaven for the righteous, hell for sinners.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: As the novel advances, Belford converts to a moral life, inspired by Clarissa’s example.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Reveals. “Unbosoming himself”: confessing his secret thoughts.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Clarissa censures herself to excuse her vindictive family members, whom she reveres.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Lovelace frequently calls Clarissa an angel through the novel.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Suit and reveal their characters.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lovelace and Howe, respectively.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Their outcomes uncertain.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The comments appear in a letter of John Belford toward the end of the novel, slightly misquoted here.[Return to reference 4](#)



## SAMUEL JOHNSON

In *Rambler* 4, as Samuel Johnson (1709–1784; see [p. 788](#)) assesses the innovations in fiction in his own age, he voices some of his fundamental critical principles. He is enthusiastic about the popular appeal of the modern novel, and its duty to be true to the experiences of readers, even though its incidents are invented. Such fictional truth, he believes, is always gratifying. And he insists that novels ought to adhere to a moral purpose, especially given their popularity among the young. He recognized, however, that the writerly attempt to be true to life is often at odds with the aim to be moral, hence the problem of characters who exhibit a mixture of “good and bad qualities.” In his vigorous approval of the aims and effects of the fictions of the eighteenth century, Johnson helped to canonize not just particular novels but the novel form itself.

# ***Rambler 4***

[ON FICTION]

Saturday, *March 31*, 1750

*Simul et jucunda et idonea dicere vitae.*

—HORACE, *Art of Poetry*, 334

And join both profit and delight in one.

—CREECH

The works of fiction with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind.

This kind of writing may be termed, not improperly, the comedy of romance, and is to be conducted nearly by the rules of comic poetry. Its province is to bring about natural events by easy means, and to keep up curiosity without the help of wonder: it is therefore precluded from the machines<sup>1</sup> and expedients of the heroic romance, and can neither employ giants to snatch away a lady from the nuptial rites, nor knights to bring her back from captivity; it can neither bewilder its personages in deserts, nor lodge them in imaginary castles.

I remember a remark made by Scaliger upon Pontanus,<sup>2</sup> that all his writings are filled with the same images; and that if you take from him his lilies and his roses, his satyrs and his dryads, he will have nothing left that can be called poetry. In like manner, almost all the fictions of the last age will vanish if you deprive them of a hermit and a wood, a battle and a shipwreck.

Why this wild strain of imagination found reception so long in polite and learned ages, it is not easy to conceive; but we cannot wonder that while readers could be procured, the authors were willing to continue it; for when a man had by practice gained some fluency of language, he had no further care than to retire to his closet, let loose his invention, and heat his mind with incredibilities; a book was thus produced without fear of criticism, without the toil of study, without knowledge of nature, or acquaintance with life.

The task of our present writers is very different; it requires, together with that learning which is to be gained from books, that experience which can never be attained by solitary diligence, but must arise from general converse and accurate observation of the living world. Their performances have, as Horace expresses it, *plus oneris quanto veniae minus*,<sup>3</sup> little indulgence, and therefore more difficulty. They are engaged in portraits of which everyone knows the original, and can detect any deviation from exactness of resemblance. Other writings are safe, except from the malice of learning, but these are in danger from every common reader; as the slipper ill executed was censured by a shoemaker who happened to stop in his way at the Venus of Apelles.<sup>4</sup>

But the fear of not being approved as just copiers of human manners is not the most important concern that an author of this sort ought to have before him. These books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life. They are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account.

That the highest degree of reverence should be paid to youth, and that nothing indecent should be suffered to approach their eyes or ears, are precepts extorted by sense and virtue from an ancient writer by no means eminent for chastity of thought.<sup>5</sup> The same kind, though not the same degree, of caution, is required in everything

which is laid before them, to secure them from unjust prejudices, perverse opinions, and incongruous combinations of images.

In the romances formerly written, every transaction and sentiment was so remote from all that passes among men that the reader was in very little danger of making any applications to himself; the virtues and crimes were equally beyond his sphere of activity; and he amused himself with heroes and with traitors, deliverers and persecutors, as with beings of another species, whose actions were regulated upon motives of their own, and who had neither faults nor excellencies in common with himself.

But when an adventurer is leveled with the rest of the world, and acts in such scenes of the universal drama as may be the lot of any other man, young spectators fix their eyes upon him with closer attention, and hope, by observing his behavior and success, to regulate their own practices when they shall be engaged in the like part.

For this reason these familiar histories may perhaps be made of greater use than the solemnities of professed morality, and convey the knowledge of vice and virtue with more efficacy than axioms and definitions. But if the power of example is so great as to take possession of the memory by a kind of violence, and produce effects almost without the intervention of the will, care ought to be taken that when the choice is unrestrained, the best examples only should be exhibited; and that which is likely to operate so strongly should not be mischievous or uncertain in its effects.

The chief advantage which these fictions have over real life is that their authors are at liberty, though not to invent, yet to select objects, and to cull from the mass of mankind those individuals upon which the attention ought most to be employed; as a diamond, though it cannot be made, may be polished by art, and placed in such situation as to display that luster which before was buried among common stones.

It is justly considered as the greatest excellency of art to imitate nature; but it is necessary to distinguish those parts of nature which are most proper for imitation: greater care is still required in

representing life, which is so often discolored by passion or deformed by wickedness. If the world be promiscuously<sup>6</sup> described, I cannot see of what use it can be to read the account; or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind as upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination.

It is therefore not a sufficient vindication of a character that it is drawn as it appears, for many characters ought never to be drawn; nor of a narrative that the train of events is agreeable to observation and experience, for that observation which is called knowledge of the world will be found much more frequently to make men cunning than good. The purpose of these writings is surely not only to show mankind, but to provide that they may be seen hereafter with less hazard; to teach the means of avoiding the snares which are laid by Treachery for Innocence, without infusing any wish for that superiority with which the betrayer flatters his vanity; to give the power of counteracting fraud without the temptation to practice it; to initiate youth by mock encounters in the art of necessary defense, and to increase prudence without impairing virtue.

Many writers, for the sake of following nature, so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages that they are both equally conspicuous; and as we accompany them through their adventures with delight, and are led by degrees to interest ourselves in their favor, we lose the abhorrence of their faults because they do not hinder our pleasure, or perhaps regard them with some kindness for being united with so much merit.<sup>7</sup>

There have been men indeed splendidly wicked, whose endowments threw a brightness on their crimes, and whom scarce any villainy made perfectly detestable because they never could be wholly divested of their excellencies; but such have been in all ages the great corrupters of the world, and their resemblance ought no more to be preserved than the art of murdering without pain.

Some have advanced, without due attention to the consequences of this notion, that certain virtues have their correspondent faults, and therefore that to exhibit either apart is to deviate from probability. Thus men are observed by Swift to be "grateful in the

same degree as they are resentful." This principle, with others of the same kind, supposes man to act from a brute impulse, and pursue a certain degree of inclination without any choice of the object; for, otherwise, though it should be allowed that gratitude and resentment arise from the same constitution of the passions, it follows not that they will be equally indulged when reason is consulted; yet, unless that consequence be admitted, this sagacious maxim becomes an empty sound, without any relation to practice or to life.

Nor is it evident that even the first motions to these effects are always in the same proportion. For pride, which produces quickness of resentment, will obstruct gratitude by unwillingness to admit that inferiority which obligation implies; and it is very unlikely that he who cannot think he receives a favor will acknowledge or repay it.

It is of the utmost importance to mankind that positions of this tendency should be laid open and confuted; for while men consider good and evil as springing from the same root, they will spare the one for the sake of the other, and in judging, if not of others at least of themselves, will be apt to estimate their virtues by their vices. To this fatal error all those will contribute who confound the colors of right and wrong, and, instead of helping to settle their boundaries, mix them with so much art that no common mind is able to disunite them.

In narratives where historical veracity has no place, I cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue; of virtue not angelical, nor above probability (for what we cannot credit, we shall never imitate), but the highest and purest that humanity can reach, which, exercised in such trials as the various revolutions of things shall bring upon it, may, by conquering some calamities and enduring others, teach us what we may hope, and what we can perform. Vice (for vice is necessary to be shown) should always disgust; nor should the graces of gaiety, nor the dignity of courage, be so united with it as to reconcile it to the mind. Wherever it appears, it should raise hatred by the malignity of its practices, and contempt by the meanness of its stratagems: for

while it is supported by either parts<sup>8</sup> or spirit, it will be seldom heartily abhorred. The Roman tyrant was content to be hated if he was but feared;<sup>9</sup> and there are thousands of the readers of romances willing to be thought wicked if they may be allowed to be wits. It is therefore to be steadily inculcated that virtue is the highest proof of understanding, and the only solid basis of greatness; and that vice is the natural consequence of narrow thoughts; that it begins in mistake, and ends in ignominy.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The technical term in neoclassical critical theory for the supernatural agents who intervene in human affairs in epic and tragedy.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1558) criticized the Latin poems of the Italian poet Jovianus Pontanus (1426–1503).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: *Epistles* 2.1.170.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: According to Pliny the Younger (*Naturalis Historia* 35.85), the Greek painter Apelles of Kos (4th century B.C.E.) corrected the drawing of a sandal after hearing a shoemaker criticize it as faulty, but when the flattered artisan dared to find fault with the drawing of a leg, the artist bade him “stick to his last.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Juvenal’s *Satires* 14.1–58.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Indiscriminately.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Johnson is probably thinking of such popular novels as Tobias Smollett’s *Roderick Random* (1748) and Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749), as opposed to the model of virtue provided by Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1747–48).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Abilities.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The emperor Tiberius (see Suetonius’s *Lives of the Caesars*).[Return to reference 9](#)

# CHARLOTTE LENNOX

Charlotte Lennox (1730?–1804), née Charlotte Ramsay, was born in Gibraltar (a British territory on the Iberian peninsula) and spent some of her early life in New York, where her father's military career had taken the family. She arrived in England at fifteen, turned author, and married Scotsman Alexander Lennox. Eventually she began to move in a circle of powerful literary friends and became a celebrated writer of poems, plays, periodical essays, translations, literary criticism, and novels.

Her most famous work, *The Female Quixote; or the Adventures of Arabella* (1752), is a novel about reading novels. Like the famous hero of Miguel de Cervantes' Spanish classic *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), Lennox's Arabella bases her understanding of the world on the unrealistic fictions she voraciously reads. Arabella particularly loves old seventeenth-century French romances, with their improbable, sensational plots and highly wrought depictions of love and adventure. Over and over again—as in the selection here—Arabella's romance reading leads her to misunderstand the things actually happening around her in modern-day England. At the novel's conclusion, a clergyman helps Arabella realize her mistake: he explains that romance novels are "senseless fictions." They "vitate" (or spoil) "the mind, and pervert the understanding." The lesson here echoes much period discourse about the dangers of novel reading, but of course there is an important difference, as the sentiment occurs in a novel—a novel that ends rather like a romance, with Arabella's happy marriage. The clergyman himself



allows, "Truth is not always injured by fiction." He recommends that Arabella read, instead, Samuel Richardson's more probable and more moralistic fiction. Though Arabella eventually gives up romance reading, Lennox herself kept on writing her own kind of novels, social comedies with young women as protagonists: *Henrietta* (1758), *Sophia* (1762), and *Euphemia* (1790).

## ***From The Female Quixote***

**From Chapter 1. Contains a turn at court, neither new nor surprising. Some useless additions to a fine lady's education. The bad effects of a whimsical study, which some will say is borrowed from Cervantes.**

The Marquis of —, for a long series of years, was the first and most distinguished favorite at court: he held the most honorable employments under the crown, disposed of all places of profit as he pleased, presided at the council, and in a manner governed the whole kingdom.

This extensive authority could not fail of making him many enemies: he fell at last a sacrifice to the plots they were continually forming against him; and was not only removed from all his employments, but banished the court forever.

The pain his undeserved disgrace gave him, he was enabled to conceal by the natural haughtiness of his temper; and, behaving rather like a man who had resigned, than been dismissed from his posts, he imagined he triumphed sufficiently over the malice of his enemies, while he seemed to be wholly insensible of the effects it produced. His secret discontent, however, was so much augmented by the opportunity he now had of observing the baseness and ingratitude of mankind, which in some degree he experienced every day, that he resolved to quit all society whatever, and devote the rest of his life to solitude and privacy. For the place of his retreat he pitched upon a castle he had in a very remote province of the kingdom, in the neighborhood of a small village, and several miles distant from any town. The vast extent of ground which surrounded this noble building, he had caused to be laid out in a manner peculiar to his taste: the most laborious endeavors of art had been used to make it appear like the beautiful product of wild, uncultivated nature. But if this epitome of Arcadia<sup>1</sup> could boast of only artless and simple beauties, the inside of the castle was adorned with a magnificence suitable to the dignity and immense riches of the owner.

While things were preparing at the castle for his reception, the Marquis, though now advanced in years, cast his eyes on a young lady, greatly inferior to himself in quality,<sup>2</sup> but whose beauty and good sense promised him an agreeable companion. After a very short courtship, he married her, and in a few weeks carried his new bride into the country, from whence he absolutely resolved never to return.

The Marquis, following the plan of life he had laid down, divided his time between the company of his lady, his library, which was large and well furnished, and his gardens. Sometimes he took the diversion of hunting, but never admitted any company whatever; and his pride and extreme reserve rendered him so wholly inaccessible to the country gentry about him, that none ever presumed to solicit his acquaintance.

In the second year of his retirement, the Marchioness brought him a daughter, and died in three days after her delivery. The Marquis, who had tenderly loved her, was extremely afflicted at her death; but time having produced its usual effects, his great fondness for the little Arabella entirely engrossed his attention, and made up all the happiness of his life. At four years of age he took her from under the direction of the nurses and women appointed to attend her, and permitted her to receive no part of her education from another, which he was capable of giving her himself. He taught her to read and write in a very few months; and, as she grew older, finding in her an uncommon quickness of apprehension, and an understanding capable of great improvements, he resolved to cultivate so promising a genius<sup>3</sup> with the utmost care; and, as he frequently, in the rapture of paternal fondness, expressed himself, render her mind as beautiful as her person<sup>4</sup> was lovely.

Nature had indeed given her a most charming face, a shape easy and delicate, a sweet and insinuating<sup>5</sup> voice, and an air so full of dignity and grace, as drew the admiration of all that saw her. These native charms were improved with all the heightenings of art; her dress was perfectly magnificent; the best masters of music and dancing were sent for from London to attend her. She soon became

a perfect mistress of the French and Italian languages, under the care of her father; and it is not to be doubted, but she would have made a great proficiency in all useful knowledge, had not her whole time been taken up by another study.

From her earliest youth she had discovered a fondness for reading, which extremely delighted the Marquis; he permitted her therefore the use of his library, in which, unfortunately for her, were great store of romances, and, what was still more unfortunate, not in the original French, but very bad translations.

The deceased Marchioness had purchased these books to soften a solitude which she found very disagreeable; and, after her death, the Marquis removed them from her closet<sup>6</sup> into his library, where Arabella found them.

The surprising adventures with which they were filled, proved a most pleasing entertainment to a young lady, who was wholly secluded from the world; who had no other diversion, but ranging like a nymph<sup>7</sup> through gardens, or, to say better, the woods and lawns in which she was enclosed; and who had no other conversation but that of a grave and melancholy father, or her own attendants.

Her ideas, from the manner of her life, and the objects around her, had taken a romantic<sup>8</sup> turn; and, supposing romances were real pictures of life, from them she drew all her notions and expectations. By them she was taught to believe that love was the ruling principle of the world; that every other passion was subordinate to this; and that it caused all the happiness and miseries of life. Her glass,<sup>9</sup> which she often consulted, always showed her a form so extremely lovely, that, not finding herself engaged in such adventures as were common to the heroines in the romances she read, she often complained of the insensibility of mankind, upon whom her charms seemed to have so little influence.

The perfect retirement she lived in afforded indeed no opportunities of making the conquests she desired; but she could not comprehend, how any solitude could be obscure enough to conceal a beauty like hers from notice; and thought the reputation

of her charms sufficient to bring a crowd of adorers to demand her of her father. Her mind being wholly filled with the most extravagant expectations, she was alarmed by every trifling incident; and kept in a continual anxiety by a vicissitude of hopes, fears, wishes, and disappointments.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Classical site of pastoral poetry, an idyllic garden paradise.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rank, social status.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mental ability and disposition.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Body, appearance.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Gently appealing or attractive.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Personal chamber.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "A goddess of the woods, meadows, or waters" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Formed by romances.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Mirror.[Return to reference 9](#)

**From Chapter 7. *In which some contradictions are very happily reconciled.***

The Marquis's head gardener had received a young fellow into his master's service, who had lived in several families of distinction. He had a good face; was tolerably genteel; and having an understanding something above his condition, joined to a great deal of second-hand politeness, which he had contracted while he lived at London,<sup>1</sup> he appeared a very extraordinary person among the rustics who were his fellow servants.

Arabella, when she walked in the garden, had frequent opportunities of seeing this young man, whom she observed with a very particular attention. His person and air had something, she thought, very distinguishing. When she condescended to speak to him about any business he was employed in, she took notice, that his answers were framed in a language vastly superior to his condition; and the respect he paid her had quite another air from that of the awkward civility of the other servants.

Having discerned so many marks of a birth far from being mean,<sup>2</sup> she easily passed from an opinion that he was a gentleman to a belief that he was something more; and every new sight of him adding strength to her suspicions, she remained, in a little time, perfectly convinced that he was some person of quality, who, disguised in the habit of a gardener, had introduced himself into her father's service, in order to have an opportunity of declaring a passion to her, which must certainly be very great, since it had forced him to assume an appearance so unworthy of his noble extraction.<sup>3</sup>

Wholly possessed with this thought, she set herself to observe him more narrowly; and soon found out, that he went very awkwardly about his work; that he sought opportunities of being alone; that he threw himself in her way as often as he could, and gazed on her very attentively: she sometimes fancied she saw him endeavor to smother a sigh when he answered her any question

about his work; once saw him leaning against a tree with his hands crossed upon his breast; and, having lost a string of small pearls, which she remembered he had seen her threading as she sat in one of the arbors, was persuaded he had taken it up, and kept it for the object of his secret adoration.

She often wondered, indeed, that she did not find her name carved on the trees, with some mysterious expressions of love; that he was never discovered lying along the side of one of the little rivulets, increasing the stream with his tears; nor, for three months that he had lived there, had ever been sick of a fever caused by his grief, and the constraint he put upon himself in not declaring his passion: but she considered again, that his fear of being discovered kept him from amusing himself with making the trees bear the records of his secret thoughts, or of indulging his melancholy in any manner expressive of the condition of his soul; and, as for his not being sick, his youth and the strength of his constitution might, even for a longer time, bear him up against the assaults of a fever: but he appeared much thinner and paler than he used to be; and she concluded, therefore, that he must in time sink under the violence of his passion, or else be forced to declare it to her; which she considered as a very great misfortune; for, not finding in herself any disposition to approve his love, she must necessarily banish him from her presence, for fear he should have the presumption to hope that time might do any thing in his favor: and it was possible also, that the sentence she would be obliged to pronounce might either cause his death, or force him to commit some extravagant action, which would discover him to her father, who would, perhaps, think her guilty of holding a secret correspondence with him.

These thoughts perplexed her so much, that, hoping to find some relief by unburdening her mind to Lucy,<sup>4</sup> she told her all her uneasiness. Ah! said she to her, looking upon Edward, who had just passed them, how unfortunate do I think myself in being the cause of that passion which makes this illustrious unknown wear away his days in so shameful an obscurity! Yes, Lucy, pursued she, that Edward, whom you regard as one of my father's menial servants, is



a person of sublime quality, who submits to this disguise only to have an opportunity of seeing me every day. But why do you seem so surprised? Is it possible that you have not suspected him to be what he is? Has he never unwittingly made any discovery of himself? Have you not surprised him in discourse with his faithful squire, who, certainly, lurks hereabouts to receive his commands, and is haply<sup>5</sup> the confidant of his passion? Has he never entertained you with any conversation about me? Or have you never seen any valuable jewels in his possession by which you suspected him to be not what he appears?

Truly, madam, replied Lucy, I never took him for anybody else but a simple gardener; but now you open my eyes, methinks I can find I have been strangely mistaken; for he does not look like a man of low degree; and he talks quite in another manner from our servants. I never heard him indeed speak of your ladyship, but once; and that was, when he first saw you walking in the garden, he asked our John, if you was not the Marquis's daughter. And he said, you was as beautiful as an angel. As for fine jewels, I never saw any; and I believe he has none; but he has a watch, and that looks as if he was something, madam: nor do I remember to have seen him talk with any stranger that looked like a squire.

Lucy, having thus, with her usual punctuality, answered every question her lady put to her, proceeded to ask her, what she should say, if he should beg her to give her a letter, as the other gentleman had done.

You must by no means take it, replied Arabella: my compassion had before like to have been fatal to me.<sup>6</sup> If he discovers his quality to me, I shall know in what manner to treat him.

They were in this part of their discourse, when a noise they heard at some distance made Arabella bend her steps to the place from whence it proceeded; and, to her infinite amazement, saw the head gardener, with a stick he had in his hand, give several blows to the concealed hero, who suffered the indignity with admirable patience.

Shocked at seeing a person of quality treated so unworthily, she called out to the gardener to hold his hand, who immediately obeyed; and Edward, seeing the young lady advance, sneaked off, with an air very different from an Oroondates.<sup>7</sup>

For what crime, pray, said Arabella, with a stern aspect, did you treat the person I saw with you so cruelly? He whom you take such unbecoming liberties with, may possibly—But again I ask you, what has he done? You should make some allowance for his want of skill in the abject employment he is in at present.

It is not for his want of skill, madam, said the gardener, that I corrected him; he knows his business very well, if he would mind it; but, madam, I have discovered him—

Discovered him, do you say? interrupted Arabella: and has the knowledge of his condition not been able to prevent such usage? Or rather, has it been the occasion of his receiving it?

His conditions are very bad, madam, returned the gardener; and I am afraid are such as will one day prove the ruin of body and soul too. I have for some time suspected he had bad designs in his head; and just now watched him to the fish-pond, and prevented him from —

O dear! interrupted Lucy, looking pitifully on her lady, whose fair bosom heaved with compassion, I warrant he was going to make away with himself.<sup>8</sup>

No, resumed the gardener, smiling at the mistake, he was only going to make away with<sup>9</sup> some of the carp, which the rogue had caught, and intended, I suppose, to sell; but I threw them into the water again; and if your ladyship had not forbid me, I would have drubbed him soundly for his pains.

Fye! fye! interrupted Arabella, out of breath with shame and vexation: tell me no more of these idle tales.

Then, hastily walking on to hide the blushes which this strange accusation of her illustrious lover had raised in her face, she continued for some time in the greatest perplexity imaginable.

Lucy, who followed her, and could not possibly reconcile what her lady had been telling her concerning Edward, with the circumstance of his stealing the carp, ardently wished to hear her opinion of this matter; but, seeing her deeply engaged with her own thoughts, she would not venture to disturb her.

Arabella indeed had been in such a terrible consternation, that it was some time before she even reconciled appearances to herself; but, as she had a most happy faculty in accommodating every incident to her own wishes and conceptions, she examined this matter so many different ways, drew so many conclusions, and fancied so many mysteries in the most indifferent actions of the supposed noble unknown, that she remained, at last, more than ever confirmed in the opinion, that he was some great personage, whom her beauty had forced to assume an appearance unworthy of himself: when Lucy, no longer able to keep silence, drew off her attention from those pleasing images, by speaking of the carp-stealing affair again.

Arabella, whose confusion returned at that disagreeable sound, charged her, in an angry tone, never to mention so injurious a suspicion any more: For, in fine, said she to her, do you imagine a person of his rank could be guilty of stealing carp? Alas! pursued she, sighing, he had, indeed, some fatal design; and, doubtless, would have executed it, had not this fellow so luckily prevented him.

But Mr. Woodbind, madam, said Lucy, saw the carp in his hand: I wonder what he was going to do with them.

Still, resumed Arabella, extremely chagrined, still will you wound my ears with that horrid sound? I tell you, obstinate and foolish wench, that this unhappy man went thither to die; and if he really caught the fish, it was to conceal his design from Woodbind: his great mind could not suggest to him, that it was possible he might be suspected of a baseness like that this ignorant fellow accused him of; therefore he took no care about it, being wholly possessed by his despairing thoughts.

However, madam, said Lucy, your ladyship may prevent his going to the fish-pond again, by laying your commands upon him to live.

I shall do all that I ought, answered Arabella; but my care for the safety of other persons must not make me forget what I owe to my own.

\* \* \*<sup>1</sup> [She] was at a great loss in what manner to comfort her despairing lover, without raising expectations she had no inclination to confirm: but she was delivered from her perplexity by the news of his having left the Marquis's service; which she attributed to some new design he had formed to obtain her; and Lucy, who always thought as her lady did, was of the same opinion; though it was talked among the servants, that Edward feared a discovery of more tricks, and resolved not to stay till he was disgracefully dismissed.

## Endnotes

1752

- Note 1: From imitating the upper class London families who had employed him. "Condition": rank.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Low or inferior.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Birth, lineage.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Her servant, a simple country girl.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Perhaps. "Squire": attendant.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In the previous episode, an ambitious gentleman bribed Lucy to deliver a message. Arabella, characteristically misreading events, believed her subsequent show of "compassion" to him during a sickness had motivated his attempting to kidnap her.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A reference to a hero in a French romance, Gauthier de Costes de la Calprenède's *Cassandra* (1652). "Hold": restrain.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Drown himself (she assumes, in despair for unrequited love).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Steal.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In the omitted passage, she considers her previous mistakes, aiming to avoid repeating them.[Return to reference 1](#)

## JAMES FORDYCE

James Fordyce (1720–1796) was a Scottish clergyman who found success preaching in fashionable London. His best-known work was the moralizing *Sermons to Young Women* (1766). In this excerpt from that text, he urgently “caution[s]” young women “against that fatal poison to virtue, which is conveyed by profligate and by improper books”—novels above all. His condemnation of novels was heated but not unusual. Many eighteenth-century writers worried about the dangerous moral and social implications of such fiction, especially when read by supposedly more impressionable women and children.

Fordyce had a misogynistic, patronizing view of women: no “charm of understanding, or of person,” he counsels, can “compensate the want of soft compliance and meek submission in a woman.” Years later, in 1792, feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft would roundly condemn these views: in a delicious parallel to Fordyce’s caution about novels, she insisted that his sermons (with their dangerous privileging of women’s meekness) were not safe for young women to read.

## ***From Sermon IV: On Female Virtue***

When entertainment is made the vehicle of instruction, nothing surely can be more harmless, agreeable, or useful. To prohibit young minds the perusal of any writings, where wisdom addresses the affections in the language of the imagination, may be sometimes well meant, but must be always injudicious.<sup>1</sup> Some such writings undoubtedly there are; the offspring of real genius enlightened by knowledge of the world, and prompted, it is to be hoped, by zeal for the improvement of youth.

Happy indeed beyond the vulgar storytelling tribe and highly to be praised is he, who, to fine sensibilities and a lively fancy superadding clear and comprehensive views of men and manners, writes to the heart with simplicity and chasteness, through a series of adventures well conducted, and relating chiefly to scenes in ordinary life; where the solid joys of virtue, and her sacred sorrows, are strongly contrasted with the hollowness and the horrors of vice; where, by little unexpected yet natural incidents of the tender and domestic kind, so peculiarly<sup>2</sup> fitted to touch the soul, the most important lessons are impressed, and the most generous sentiments awakened; where, to say no more, distress occasioned often by indiscretions, consistent with many degrees of worth, yet clouding it for the time, is worked up into a storm, such as to call forth the principles of fortitude and wisdom, confirming and brightening them by that exertion; till at length the bursting tempest is totally, or in a great measure dispelled, so that the hitherto suspended and agitated reader is either relieved entirely, and delighted even to transport, or has left upon his mind at the conclusion a mixture of virtuous sadness, which serves to fasten the moral deeper, and to produce an unusual sobriety in all his passions.

Amongst the few works of this kind which I have seen, I cannot but look on those of Mr. Richardson<sup>3</sup> as well entitled to the first rank;

an author, of whom an indisputable judge has with equal truth and energy pronounced, "that he taught the passions to move at the command of reason":<sup>4</sup> I will venture to add, an author, to whom your sex are under singular obligations for his uncommon attention to their best interests; but particularly for presenting, in a character sustained throughout with inexpressible pathos and delicacy, the most exalted standard of female excellence that was ever held up to their imitation. I would be understood to except that part of Clarissa's conduct, which the author meant to exhibit as exceptionable.<sup>5</sup> Setting this aside, we find in her character a beauty, a sweetness, an artlessness—what shall I say more?—a sanctity of sentiment and manner, which, I own for my part, I have never seen equaled in any book of that sort; yet such, at the same time, as appears no way impracticable for any woman who is ambitious of excelling.

Besides the beautiful productions of that incomparable pen, there seem to me to be very few, in the style of novel, that you can read with safety, and yet fewer that you can read with advantage.—What shall we say of certain books, which we are assured (for we have not read them) are in their nature so shameful, in their tendency so pestiferous,<sup>6</sup> and which contain such rank treason against the royalty of virtue, such horrible violation of all decorum, that she who can bear to peruse them must in her soul be a prostitute, let her reputation in life be what it will. But can it be true—say, ye chaste stars, that with innumerable eyes inspect the midnight behavior of mortals—can it be true, that any young woman, pretending to decency, should endure for a moment to look on this infernal brood of futility and lewdness?

Nor do we condemn those writings only, that, with an effrontery which defies the laws of God and men, carry on their very forehead the mark of the beast.<sup>7</sup> We consider the general run of novels as utterly unfit for you. Instruction they convey none. They paint scenes of pleasure and passion altogether improper for you to behold, even with the mind's eye. Their descriptions are often loose and luscious in a high degree; their representations of love between

the sexes are almost universally overstrained. All is dotage,<sup>8</sup> or despair; or else ranting swelled into burlesque. In short, the majority of their lovers are either mere lunatics, or mock-heroes. A sweet sensibility, a charming tenderness, a delightful anguish, exalted generosity, heroic worth, and refinement of thought; how seldom are these best ingredients of virtuous love mixed with any judgment or care in the composition of their principal characters!\* \* \*<sup>9</sup>

To come back to the species of writing which so many young women are apt to dote upon, the offspring of our present novelists, I mean the greater part; with whom we may join the common herd of playwrights. Beside the remarks already made on the former, is it not manifest with respect to both, that such books lead to a false taste of life and happiness; that they represent vices as frailties, and frailties as virtues; that they engender notions of love unspeakably perverting and inflammatory; that they overlook in a great measure the finest part of the passion, which one would suspect the authors had never experienced; that they turn it most commonly into an affair of wicked or of frivolous gallantry; that on many occasions they take off from the worst crimes committed in the prosecution of it, the horror which ought ever to follow them; on some occasions actually reward those very crimes, and almost on all leave the female reader with this persuasion at best, that it is their business to get husbands at any rate, and by whatever means? Add to the account, that repentance for the foulest injuries which can be done the sex is generally represented as the pang, or rather the start, of a moment; and holy wedlock converted into a sponge, to wipe out at a single stroke every stain of guilt and dishonor, which it was possible for the hero of the piece to contract.—Is this a kind of reading calculated to improve the principles, or preserve the sobriety, of female minds?<sup>1</sup> How much are those young women to be pitied, that have no wise parents or faithful tutors to direct them in relation to the books which are, or which are not, fit for them to read! How much are those parents and tutors to be commended, who with particular solicitude watch over them in so important a concern!



I conclude with saying, that the subject of this discourse has unavoidably suggested some ideas, which, had we not undertaken to address young ladies at large, we should have certainly suppressed for the sake of more modest natures, whom we would not unwillingly pain, no not for a moment. But such we hope will be candid enough to excuse us, if, by throwing out to others what to them would have been unnecessary, we may be happily instrumental in rescuing were it but one of their sex from the slavery of vice, or defending a single innocent from its snares.

## Endnotes

1766

- Note 1: Unwise.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Especially.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Novelist Samuel Richardson (see above).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Slight misquotation of Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* 97 (1751), which praised Richardson for having “taught the passions to move at the command of virtue.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Blameable. Clarissa herself offers moral commentary on actions she comes to view as mistakes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Destructive.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A sign of evil, with reference to Revelation 16:2.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Infatuation, too much doting.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: He continues to comment on both older romance fiction and contemporary attitudes about marriage.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The sermon focuses on words from 1 Timothy 2:8–9: “I will—that women adorn themselves with sobriety.”[Return to reference 1](#)

## CLARA REEVE

Like many successful women writers of the eighteenth century, Clara Reeve (1729–1807) wrote out of financial necessity, but unlike most, she did not move in metropolitan circles. Reeve's most discussed works now, the Gothic novel *The Old English Baron* (1777, 1778) and her literary history *The Progress of Romance* (1785), were first printed in the town of Colchester, near her home in Ipswich. The printing of books, pamphlets, and catalogs had increasingly spread to urban centers outside London as the century wore on, though the capital remained the undisputed center of the literary world. Never marrying, Reeve managed her literary career herself, corresponding with the booksellers in London to see nearly all of her works into print there, including novels, poems, and a treatise on women's education. Her provincial origins and life did not prevent Reeve from becoming famous. For over a century, *The Old English Baron* was read as a classic English novel, often printed together with her inspiration for it, Horace Walpole's Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)—though Reeve aims, as she says in her preface to her work, to surpass Walpole by avoiding supernatural extravagances.

Unlike *The Old English Baron*, Reeve's *The Progress of Romance* did not initially attract much attention and remained mostly unnoticed even by scholars until recently. It presents a learned history of prose fictional narrative, from ancient Greek romances (which she calls "the parents of the rest") to the novels of the eighteenth century. Reeve asserts the comprehensiveness and rigor of her scholarship: "while many eminent writers," she says in the preface, have "skimmed over the surface of this subject, it seemed to me that none of them had sounded the depths of it." Written as a dialogue between two women and a man—a form intended to enliven what otherwise might be a dry discourse—*The Progress* says romances are "neither so contemptible, nor so dangerous a kind of

reading” as is commonly supposed, compares them favorably to epic poems, and recognizes their antiquity, giving examples from not only Greek but also Arabic and even Egyptian literature. (She appends an Egyptian tale, “The History of Charoba, Queen of Egypt,” to the second volume of *The Progress*.) While firmly distinguishing romances from the modern novel in the first excerpt reprinted here, she does so not to denigrate the former, as in many other efforts to define the novel in the period, but to identify two species of the same genus. She also offers suggestive remarks on the novel’s special power over the minds of readers.

In Reeve’s account, the lineaments of later critical histories of the novel already appear. She describes the tradition of women writers starting with Aphra Behn as crucial to the modern novel’s early development. Within this account, she offers what would become a common narrative: early women novelists such as Behn and Delarivier Manley were scandalous and sexually improper, she says, but by the mid-eighteenth century a more morally edifying kind of women’s fiction began to hold sway—a transition exemplified in the career of Eliza Haywood, who redeemed herself in her final works. (Recently scholars have told a more complex story, noting that women novelists from the beginning presented the public with works at diverse points on the scale of sexual morality.) Reeve also provides illuminating terms in which to distinguish “the two most eminent writers of our country,” Richardson and Fielding—a contrast inescapable in taxonomies of English novels in the coming centuries. The final selection in this cluster recognizes not only the dangers of indiscriminate reading in the collections of circulating libraries but also how impracticable any attempt to ban fiction would be, given the prevalence of fictional stories throughout the best literature, ancient and modern. Reeve supports the reading of novels as long as it is subject to parental and other culturally authoritative monitors, and to a well-developed moral monitor within.

# ***From The Progress of Romance***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The complete title on the title page is *The Progress of Romance, through Times, Countries, and Manners, with Remarks on the Good and Bad Effects of It, on Them Respectively; in a Course of Evening Conversations.*[Return to reference 1](#)

## From *Evening VII*<sup>2</sup>

### [NOVEL AND ROMANCE]

\* \* \*

*Euphrasia.* \* \* \* The word *novel* in all languages signifies something new. It was first used to distinguish these works from romance, though they have lately been confounded together and are frequently mistaken for each other.

*Sophronia.* But how will you draw the line of distinction, so as to separate them effectually, and prevent future mistakes?

*Euphrasia.* I will attempt this distinction, and I presume if it is properly done it will be followed—if not, you are but where you were before. The romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things.—The novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The romance in lofty and elevated language describes what never happened nor is likely to happen.—The novel gives a familiar relation of such things as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves; and the perfection of it is to represent every scene in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as to deceive us into a persuasion (at least while we are reading) that all is real, until we are affected by the joys or distresses of the persons in the story, as if they were our own.

*Hortensius.* You have well distinguished, and it is necessary to make this distinction.—I clearly perceive the difference between the romance and novel, and am surprised they should be confounded together.

*Euphrasia.* I have sometimes thought it has been done insidiously, by those who endeavor to render all writings of both kinds contemptible.

*Sophronia.* I have generally observed that men of learning have spoken of them with the greatest disdain, especially collegians.<sup>3</sup>

*Euphrasia.* Take care what you say my friend, they are a set of men who are not to be offended with impunity. Yet they deal in romances, though of a different kind.—Some have taken up an opinion<sup>4</sup> upon trust in others whose judgment they prefer to their own.—Others having seen a few of the worst or dullest among them,<sup>5</sup> have judged of all the rest by them;—just as some men affect to despise our sex, because they have only conversed with the worst part of it.

*Hortensius.* Your sex knows how to retort upon ours, and to punish us for our offenses against you.—Proceed however.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

### [WOMEN NOVELISTS]

*Euphrasia.* \*\*\* Let us next consider some of the early novels of our own country.

We had early translations of the best novels of all other countries, but for a long time produced very few of our own. One of the earliest I know of is the *Cyprian Academy*, by Robert Baron<sup>7</sup> in the reign of Charles the First.—Among our early novel-writers we must reckon Mrs. Behn.<sup>8</sup>—There are strong marks of genius in all this lady's works, but unhappily, there are some parts of them very improper to be read by or recommended to virtuous minds, and especially to youth.—She wrote in an age, and to a court of licentious manners,<sup>9</sup> and perhaps we ought to ascribe to these causes the loose turn of her stories.—Let us do justice to her merits, and cast the veil of compassion over her faults.—She died in the year 1689, and lies buried in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey.<sup>1</sup>—The inscription will show how high she stood in estimation at that time.

*Hortensius.* Are you not partial to the sex of this genius?—when you excuse in her, what you would not to a man?

*Euphrasia.* Perhaps I may, and you must excuse me if I am so, especially as this lady had many fine and amiable qualities, besides

her genius for writing.

*Sophronia*. Pray let her rest in peace—you were speaking of the inscription on her monument, I do not remember it.

*Euphrasia*. It is as follows:

Mrs. Aphra Behn, 1689.

Here lies a proof that wit can never be  
Defense enough against mortality.

Let me add that Mrs. Behn will not be forgotten, so long as the tragedy of *Oroonoko* is acted; it was from her story of that illustrious African, that Mr. Southerne<sup>2</sup> wrote that play, and the most affecting parts of it are taken almost literally from her.

*Hortensius*. Peace be to her *manes*!<sup>3</sup> I shall not disturb her, or her works.

*Euphrasia*. I shall not recommend them to your perusal, Hortensius.

The next female writer of this class is Mrs. Manley,<sup>4</sup> whose works are still more exceptionable than Mrs. Behn's, and as much inferior to them in point of merit.—She hoarded up all the public and private scandal within her reach, and poured it forth, in a work too well known in the last age, though almost forgotten in the present; a work that partakes of the style of the romance, and the novel. I forbear the name, and further observations on it, as Mrs. Manley's works are sinking gradually into oblivion. I am sorry to say they were once in fashion, which obliges me to mention them, otherwise I had rather be spared the pain of disgracing an author of my own sex.

*Sophronia*. It must be confessed that these books of the last age were of worse tendency than any of those of the present.

*Euphrasia*. My dear friend, there were bad books at all times, for those who sought them.—Let us pass them over in silence.

*Hortensius*. No not yet.—Let me help your memory to one more lady-author of the same class.—Mrs. Haywood.<sup>5</sup> She has the same claim upon you as those you have last mentioned.

*Euphrasia.* I had intended to have mentioned Mrs. Haywood though in a different way, but I find you will not suffer any part of her character to escape you.

*Hortensius.* Why should she be spared any more than the others?

*Euphrasia.* Because she repented of her faults, and employed the latter part of her life in expiating the offences of the former.<sup>6</sup>—There is reason to believe that the examples of the two ladies we have spoken of seduced Mrs. Haywood into the same track; she certainly wrote some amorous novels in her youth, and also two books of the same kind as Mrs. Manley's capital work,<sup>7</sup> all of which I hope are forgotten.

*Hortensius.* I fear they will not be so fortunate, they will be known to posterity by the infamous immortality conferred upon them by Pope in his *Dunciad*.<sup>8</sup>

*Euphrasia.* Mr. Pope was severe in his castigations, but let us be just to merit of every kind. Mrs. Haywood had the singular good fortune to recover a lost reputation, and the yet greater honor to atone for her errors.—She devoted the remainder of her life and labors to the service of virtue. Mrs. Haywood was one of the most voluminous female writers that ever England produced, none of her latter works are destitute of merit, though they do not rise to the highest pitch of excellence.—*Betsy Thoughtless* is reckoned her best novel; but those works by which she is most likely to be known to posterity are the *Female Spectator* and the *Invisible Spy*.<sup>9</sup> This lady died so lately as the year 1758.<sup>1</sup>

*Sophronia.* I have heard it often said that Mr. Pope was too severe in his treatment of this lady; it was supposed that she had given him some private offense, which he resented publicly as was too much his way.

*Hortensius.* That is very likely, for he was not of a forgiving disposition.—If I have been too severe also, you ladies must forgive me in behalf of your sex.

*Euphrasia.* Truth is sometimes severe.—Mrs. Haywood's wit and ingenuity were never denied. I would be the last to vindicate her



faults, but the first to celebrate her return to virtue, and her atonement for them.

*Sophronia*. May her first writings be forgotten, and the last survive to do her honor!

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 2: As the title indicates, Reeve's work takes the form of a dialogue between three participants, two women (Euphrasia and Sophronia) and a man (Hortensius), held on a series of evenings.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Scholars affiliated with the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge universities.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That novels deserve contempt.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Novels.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Euphrasia proceeds to identify Renaissance Italian writers such as Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) as the first modern novelists, then describes the novels of Spanish master Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616), and the more realistic French fiction of the 17th century.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The *Erotopaignion; or, The Cyprian Academy* (1647) by Robert Baron (1630–1658) was written in both prose and verse and later became notorious for its wholesale copying of passages from Milton, Shakespeare, and other famous writers.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Aphra Behn (1640–1689), playwright and author of *Oroonoko* (p. 152).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The court of the Restoration era (1660–88) was often denounced for its sexual license.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Gothic church in the city of Westminster, London, where English royalty and many famous writers are buried.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Thomas Southerne (1660–1746), Irish playwright, whose tragedy *Oroonoko* (1696) was based on Behn's novel.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Borrowed from Latin, a fanciful name of the deified or otherwise respected spirit of the dead.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Delarivier Manley (ca. 1670–1724), whose "too well known" work of satirical fiction, *The New Atalantis* (1709), portrayed the scandalous doings of prominent Whigs.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Eliza Haywood (1693–1756), prolific author of fiction, including *Fantomina* (see p. 649).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Haywood's later works such as *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) took a more moral turn than her earlier ones.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Reeve probably means Haywood's *Memoirs of a Certain Island, Adjacent to Utopia* (1724) and *The Secret History of the Present Intrigues of the Court of Caramania* (1727), both of which satirically reflected on contemporary British politics by presenting fictionalized parallel "histories," in the manner of *The New Atalantis*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Alexander Pope's mockery of the book trade in his poem *The Dunciad* (1728, 1743) makes Haywood the prize in a pissing contest between booksellers.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The former is a periodical for women (1744–46) treating philosophical and social topics, the latter a work of fiction (1754) full of political and cultural reflections.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Reeve misstates Haywood's date of death, which is 1756.[Return to reference 1](#)

## From *Evening VIII*

### [RICHARDSON AND FIELDING]

*Hortensius.* You have not yet made mention of the most eminent writers of our country, Richardson and Fielding.

*Euphrasia.* I hope you did not think it possible for me to forget them. Mr. Richardson published his works at a considerable distance of time from each other. *Pamela*<sup>2</sup> was the first; it met with a very warm reception, as it well deserved to do.—I remember my mother and aunts being shut up in the parlor reading *Pamela*, and I took it very hard that I was excluded.—I have since seen it put into the hands of children, so much are their understandings riper than mine, or so much are our methods of education improved since that time.

*Sophronia.* It is a general<sup>3</sup> mistake in regard to the youth of our time, they are put too forward in all respects. Let us return to *Pamela*, I can remember the time when this book was the fashion, the person that had not read *Pamela* was disqualified for conversation, of which it was the principal subject for a long time.—You will give us your opinion of this, and the other words of Mr. Richardson?

*Euphrasia.* To praise the works of Mr. Richardson is to hold a candle to the sun, their merits are well understood in other countries besides our own; they have been translated into French, Italian, and German, and they are read in English frequently, by the people of the first rank in all the politest countries in Europe.

A lady of quality in France sent an epigram to one of Mr. Richardson's family soon after his death, which I will give you here.

\* \* \* <sup>4</sup>

Richardson is now no more!  
Then may the human heart deplore<sup>5</sup>  
Its most profound investigator,  
Its patron, friend, and regulator,

And its most perfect legislator.

*Hortensius.* Very close indeed to the original.

*Sophronia.* But your remarks on Richardson's works?

*Euphrasia.* I will hazard a few remarks on them, which perhaps I may be allowed, because no person whatever has read them over with more pleasure and delight than myself.

It seems that *Pamela* is the *chef d'oeuvre*<sup>6</sup> of Mr. Richardson.—The originality, the beautiful simplicity of the manners and language of the charming maid, are interesting past expression; and find a short way to the heart, which it engages by its best and noblest feelings.—There needs no other proof of a bad and corrupted heart, than its being insensible to the distresses, and incapable<sup>7</sup> to the rewards of virtue.—I should want no other criterion of a *good* or a *bad* heart, than the manner in which a young person was affected by reading *Pamela*.

*Hortensius.* Your plaudit is a warm one.—But Richardson is a writer all your own; your sex are more obliged to him and Addison,<sup>8</sup> than to all other men-authors.

*Euphrasia.* I deny that.—We have many other redoubtable champions as I shall bring proof enough,—and no man is degraded by defending us, for the female cause is the cause of virtue.

*Hortensius.* I mean not to degrade your champions or their cause.—But let us hear your critique on Mr. Richardson's other works?

*Euphrasia.* It was yourself who digressed from the subject. I have but little more to say of them; that all are of capital merit is indisputable; but it seems to me that *Pamela* has the most originality.—*Grandison* the greatest regularity and equality.—*Clarissa* the highest graces, and most defects.<sup>9</sup>

Mr. Richardson was besides the first who wrote novels in the epistolary style, and he was truly an original writer.

\* \* \*

*Euphrasia.* The next author upon the list, and whom Hortensius feared I should forget, is Henry Fielding, Esq., whose works are universally known and admired.—As I consider wit only as a secondary merit, I must beg leave to observe that his writings are as much inferior to Richardson's in morals and exemplary characters, as they are superior in wit and learning.—Young men of warm passions and not strict principles are always desirous to shelter themselves under the sanction of mixed characters, wherein virtue is allowed to be predominant.—In this light the character of Tom Jones is capable of doing much mischief; and for this reason a translation of this book was prohibited in France.<sup>1</sup>—On the contrary no harm can possibly arise from the imitation of a perfect character, though the attempt should fail of the original.

*Sophronia.* This is an indisputable truth—there are many objectionable scenes in Fielding's works, which I think Hortensius will not defend.

*Hortensius.* My objections were in character, and yours are so likewise; as you have defended Richardson, so I will defend Fielding. I allow there is some foundation for your remarks, nevertheless in all Fielding's works, virtue has always the superiority she ought to have, and challenges the honors that are justly due to her, the general tenor of them is in her favor, and it were happy for us, if our language had no greater cause of complaint in her behalf.

*Euphrasia.* There we will agree with you.—Have you any further observations to make upon Fielding's writings?

*Hortensius.* Since you refer this part of your task to me, I will offer a few more remarks.—Fielding's *Amelia*<sup>2</sup> is in much lower estimation than his *Joseph Andrews*, or *Tom Jones*; which have both received the stamp of public applause. He likewise wrote several dramatic pieces of various merits,<sup>3</sup> but these and his other works have no place in our present retrospect.—Lest you should think me too partial to the merits of this writer, I will give you the sentence of an historian upon him. "The genius of Cervantes" (says Dr. Smollett) "was transfused into the novels of Fielding, who painted the

characters, and ridiculed the follies of life, with equal strength, humor, and propriety.”<sup>4</sup>

*Euphrasia*. We are willing to join with you in paying the tribute due to Fielding’s genius, humor, and knowledge of mankind, but he certainly painted human nature as *it is*, rather than as *it ought to be*.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Published in 1740, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, tells the story, in letters, of a young servant woman harassed by her employer, whom she resists and eventually marries.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Widespread.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Euphrasia quotes the passage in French, then provides her own literal translation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Grieve over, lament the loss of.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Masterpiece.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Insusceptible.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Joseph Addison (1672–1719), author, with Richard Steele, of the periodical the *Spectator* (1711–14; see p. 281).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The two novels Richardson wrote after *Pamela*: *Clarissa* (1748; see above), and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), which tells the story of a virtuous aristocrat who honors women and defends them against wicked men.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A French translation of Fielding’s masterpiece, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), was suppressed when it was discovered that the bookseller who published it did not have permission from an official censor to do so.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: His last novel, published in 1751.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Fielding was a prolific comic dramatist in the 1730s.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From Tobias Smollett's *Continuation of the Complete History of England*, vol. 4 (1761).[Return to reference 4](#)

## From *Evening XII*

### [CIRCULATING LIBRARIES]

*Euphrasia.* A circulating library<sup>5</sup> is indeed a great evil—young people are allowed to subscribe to them, and to read indiscriminately all they contain; and thus both food and poison are conveyed to the young mind together.

*Hortensius.* I should suppose that if books of the worst kind were excluded, still there would be enough to lay a foundation of idleness and folly.—A person used to this kind of reading will be disgusted with everything serious or solid, as a weakened and depraved stomach rejects plain and wholesome food.

*Sophronia.* There is truth and justice in your observation—but how to prevent it?

*Hortensius.* There are yet more and greater evils behind. The seeds of vice and folly are sown in the heart—the passions are awakened—false expectations are raised.—A young woman is taught to expect adventures and intrigues—she expects to be addressed in the style of these books, with the language of flattery and adulation.—If a plain man addresses her in rational terms and pays her the greatest of compliments—that of desiring to spend his life with her—that is not sufficient, her vanity is disappointed, she expects to meet a hero in romance.

*Euphrasia.* No, Hortensius—not a hero in romance, but a fine gentleman in a novel—you will not make the distinction.

*Hortensius.* I ask your pardon, I agreed to the distinction and therefore ought to observe it.

*Euphrasia.* I would not have interrupted you on this punctilio;<sup>6</sup> but let us walk into the house, and pursue the subject in the library.

*Hortensius.* Now<sup>7</sup> you are armed with your extracts, you think yourself invulnerable.

*Euphrasia.* I will not attempt to contradict you, unless I have good reason for it.—I beg you to proceed with your remarks.



*Hortensius.* From this kind of reading, young people fancy themselves capable of judging of men and manners, and that they are knowing, while involved<sup>8</sup> in the profoundest ignorance. They believe themselves wiser than their parents and guardians, whom they treat with contempt and ridicule.—Thus armed with ignorance, conceit, and folly, they plunge into the world and its dissipations, and who can wonder if they become its victims? For such as the foundation is, such will be the superstructure.

*Euphrasia.* All this is undoubtedly true, but at the same time would you exclude all works of fiction from the young reader?—In this case you would deprive him of the pleasure and improvement he might receive from works of genius, taste, and morality.

*Hortensius.* Yes, I would serve them as the priest did *Don Quixote's* library, burn the good ones for being found in bad company.<sup>9</sup>

*Euphrasia.* That is being very severe, especially if you consider how far your execution would extend.—If you would prohibit reading *all* works of fiction, what will become of your favorites the great ancients, as well as the most ingenious and enlightened modern writers?

*Sophronia.* Surely this is carrying the prohibition too far, and though it may sound well in theory, it would be utterly impracticable.

*Hortensius.* I do not deny that.—There are many things to be wished, that are not to be hoped. I see no way to cure this vice of the times, but by extirpating the cause of it.

*Euphrasia.* Pray Hortensius, is all this severity in behalf of our sex or your own?

*Hortensius.* Of both.—Yet yours are most concerned in my remonstrance for they read more of these books than ours, and consequently are most hurt by them.

*Euphrasia.* You will then become a knight errant, to combat with the windmills, which your imagination represents as giants;<sup>1</sup> while in the mean time you leave a side unguarded.

*Hortensius.* And you have found it out.—Pray tell me without metaphors your meaning in plain English?

*Euphrasia.* It seems to me that you are unreasonably severe upon these books, which you suppose to be appropriated to our sex (which however is not the case)—not considering how many books of worse tendency are put into the hands of the youth of your own, without scruple.

*Hortensius.* Indeed! how will you bring proofs of that assertion?

*Euphrasia.* I will not go far for them. I will fetch them from the school books, that generally make a part of the education of young men.—They are taught the history—the mythology—the morals—of the great ancients, whom you and all learned men revere.—But with these, they learn also—their idolatry—their follies—their vices—and everything that is shocking to virtuous manners. Lucretius teaches them that fear first made gods<sup>2</sup>—that men grew out of the earth like trees, and that the indulgence of the passions and appetites is the truest wisdom. Juvenal and Persius<sup>3</sup> describe such scenes as I may venture to affirm that romance and novel writers of any credit would blush at—and Virgil, the modest and delicate Virgil, informs them of many things, they had better be ignorant of.—As a woman I cannot give this argument its full weight—but a hint is sufficient—and I presume you will not deny the truth of my assertion.

*Hortensius.* I am astonished—admonished—and convinced!—I cannot deny the truth of what you have advanced, I confess that a reformation is indeed wanting in the mode of education of the youth of our sex.

*Sophronia.* Of both sexes you may say.—We will not condemn yours and justify our own.—You are convinced, and Euphrasia will use her victory generously I am certain.

*Euphrasia.* You judge rightly.—I do not presume to condemn indiscriminately the books used in the education of youth; but surely they might be better selected, and some omitted, without any disadvantage.—I fear there is little prospect of such a general reformation as Hortensius generously wishes for. If any method can be found to alleviate these evils, it must be lenient—gradual—and

practicable.—Let us then try to find out some expedient, with respect to those kind of books, which are our proper subject.

As this kind of reading is so common, and so much in everybody's power, it is the more incumbent on parents and guardians to give young people a good taste for reading, and above all to lay the foundation of good principles from their very infancy; to make them read what is really good, and by forming their taste teach to despise paltry books of every kind. When they come to maturity of reason, they will scorn to run over<sup>4</sup> a circulating library, but will naturally aspire to read the best books of all kinds.

## Endnotes

1785

- Note 5: New in the 18th century, libraries required families to subscribe by paying a fee for access to the latest books, including novels.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Minor point.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: We are to imagine some elapsed time as the dialogists move indoors to the library, though the text does not represent it.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Enfolded.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In [chapter 6](#) of part 1 of *Don Quixote*, a priest and a barber resolve to burn Don Quixote's books of chivalry.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Euphrasia evokes the famous episode of Don Quixote tilting at windmills.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The line "first of all, fear created the gods" comes from the *Thebaid* by Roman poet Statius (ca. 45–ca. 96 C.E.), though the poem *Of the Nature of Things* by Lucretius (ca. 99–ca. 55 B.C.E.) offers that and the other tenets of Epicurean philosophy here listed.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Persius (34–62 C.E.) and Juvenal (late 1st–early 2nd century C.E.), Roman satirical poets.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Read indiscriminately in.[Return to reference 4](#)

# **WILLIAM HOGARTH**

## **1697–1764**

William Hogarth was a Londoner born and bred; the life of the city, both high and low, fills his work. His early life was hard. When his father, a writer and teacher, failed in business, the family was confined to the area of the Fleet, the debtor's prison. Hogarth never forgot "the cruel treatment" of his father by booksellers, and he resolved to make his living without relying on dealers; he would always be aggressively independent. Apprenticed as an engraver, he trained himself to sketch scenes quickly or catch them in memory. He also learned to paint, studying with the serjeant painter to the king, Sir James Thornhill, whose daughter he married (late in life Hogarth himself would become serjeant painter). Gradually he won a reputation for portraits and conversation pieces—group portraits in which members of a family or assembly interact in a social situation. But his popular fame was forged by sets of pictures that told a story: *A Harlot's Progress* (1731–32), *A Rake's Progress* (1734–35), and *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1743–45). First Hogarth painted these Modern Moral Subjects (as he called them), then prints were made and sold in large editions. He also found new ways to market and protect his work; a copyright bill to ban cheap imitations of prints was known as "Hogarth's Act." Despite this success, however, his ambition to redefine British standards of art led to frustration. The high regard and high prices for continental old masters were too well entrenched to be undermined. Hogarth did not get prestigious commissions, and

his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753), an effort to fix “the fluctuating ideas of taste” by appealing to practical observations, not academic rules, was poorly received. Political and aesthetic controversies embittered his final years.

Writers have always loved Hogarth’s satiric art, and many have claimed him as one of their own. Swift, Fielding, and Sterne associated their work with his; Horace Walpole considered him more “a writer of comedy with a pencil” than a painter; Charles Lamb compared him to Shakespeare; and William Hazlitt included him among the great English comic writers. This emphasis may slight Hogarth’s importance in the history of art. His attempts to found a British school that looked at life and nature directly, not through a haze of ideas or reverence for the past, and to give pleasure to common people, not only to critics and connoisseurs, opened the eyes of many artists to come. But Hogarth is also a great storyteller, someone to *read*. Like novels and plays, his pictures have plots and morals; they ask us not only to look but also to think. Yet looking and thinking are always intertwined. The mind delights in riddles, according to Hogarth; and as he revised his work he stuffed in more and more clues, like a mystery writer. A feast of interpretation draws the reader in. So many expressive details crowd the pictures, so many keys to character and meaning, that viewers often become obsessed with figuring them out. Even inanimate objects can speak; playwrights rely on words, as Walpole pointed out, but “it was reserved to Hogarth to write a scene of furniture.”

The furniture is particularly eloquent in *Marriage A-la-Mode*; note, for example, the fallen chairs in Plates 2 and 6. Hogarth took special pains with this series. The audience at which he aimed, as well as the subject matter, belonged to high society; and the art too is highly refined. A sinuous line weaves through each picture, leading the reader on, and each piece of bric-a-brac carries a message of lavish excess. Yet the story itself is brutally straightforward. A disastrous forced marriage stands at the center: a rich but miserly merchant buys the worthless son of an aristocrat for his restless daughter, and with nothing in common the couple destroy one

another. The crisis of values that Hogarth depicts was bringing about radical changes in English life. In the tension between a fading aristocracy, both morally and financially bankrupt, and an upwardly mobile middle class, greedy for power but culturally insecure, the marriage reflects a society that has lost all sense of right and wrong. The artist plays no favorites. The aristocratic Squanderfields are not only vain, effete, and dissipated but also lacking in taste; the wan mythological paintings on their walls are just the sort of pretentious, overpriced art that Hogarth hates. But the vulgar Dutch art on the merchant's walls (in Plate 6) seems even worse, and his daughter falls for every extravagant, spurious fashion (in Plate 4). Nor do the parasites who live off these easy marks offer any hope. Lawyer and doctor, bawd and servant pave the road to ruin. Hogarth's satire warns against the spreading corruption of modern times, when self-interest eats into marriage and old values die. Look hard, he tells the public. These objects make up the world we live in. We might become these people.

Many commentaries have been written on Hogarth's pictures. The notes printed here were supplied by the editors of this volume.



# Marriage A-la-Mode



Plate 1. ***The Marriage Contract.*** Lord Squanderfield points to the family tree, going back to William the Conqueror, that his son will bring to the marriage. Coronets are blazed all over the room, from the top of the canopy at the upper left to the lower right on the prostrate dog's side, incised just behind the shoulder. The earl, though hobbled by gout, is proud. But he has run out of money: construction has stopped on the Palladian mansion seen through the window. Sitting across from him, a squinting merchant grasps the marriage settlement. Some of the coins and banknotes he has placed on the table have been taken up by a scrawny usurer, who hands the earl a mortgage in return. At the right the betrothed sit back to back, uncaring as the dogs chained to each other below. The vacuous viscount pinches snuff and



gazes at himself in a mirror, which ominously reflects the image of lawyer Silvertongue, who sharpens his pen as he bends unctuously over the bride-to-be. Pouting, she twirls her wedding ring in a handkerchief. Disasters from mythology cover the walls. A bombastic portrait of the earl as Jupiter, astride a cannon, dominates the room; and in a candle sconce on the right Medusa glowers over the scene.

---



Plate 2. ***After the Marriage.*** By now the couple are used to ignoring each other. The morning after a spree, the rumped, exhausted viscount slouches in a chair. His broken sword has dropped on the carpet, and a lapdog sniffs at a woman's cap in his pocket—souvenirs of the night. Lolling and stretching in an unladylike pose, his wife too is half asleep. She has spent the night home but not alone. *Hoyle on Whist* lies before her, cards are scattered on the floor, and the overturned chair, book of music, and violin cases suggest that some player may have



departed in haste. A steward carries away a sheaf of bills—only one paid—and the household ledger; a Methodist (*Regeneration* is in his pocket), he petitions heaven to look down on these heathens. Oriental idols decorate the mantel over the fireplace, surmounted by a broken-nosed Roman bust that frowns like the steward and a painting of Cupid playing the bagpipes. On the left, amid the shrubbery of a rococo clock, a cat leers over fish and a Buddha smiles. In the next room, a dozing servant fails to notice that a candle has set fire to a chair. Next to a row of saints, a curtain does not quite cover a bawdy painting from which a naked foot peeps.

---

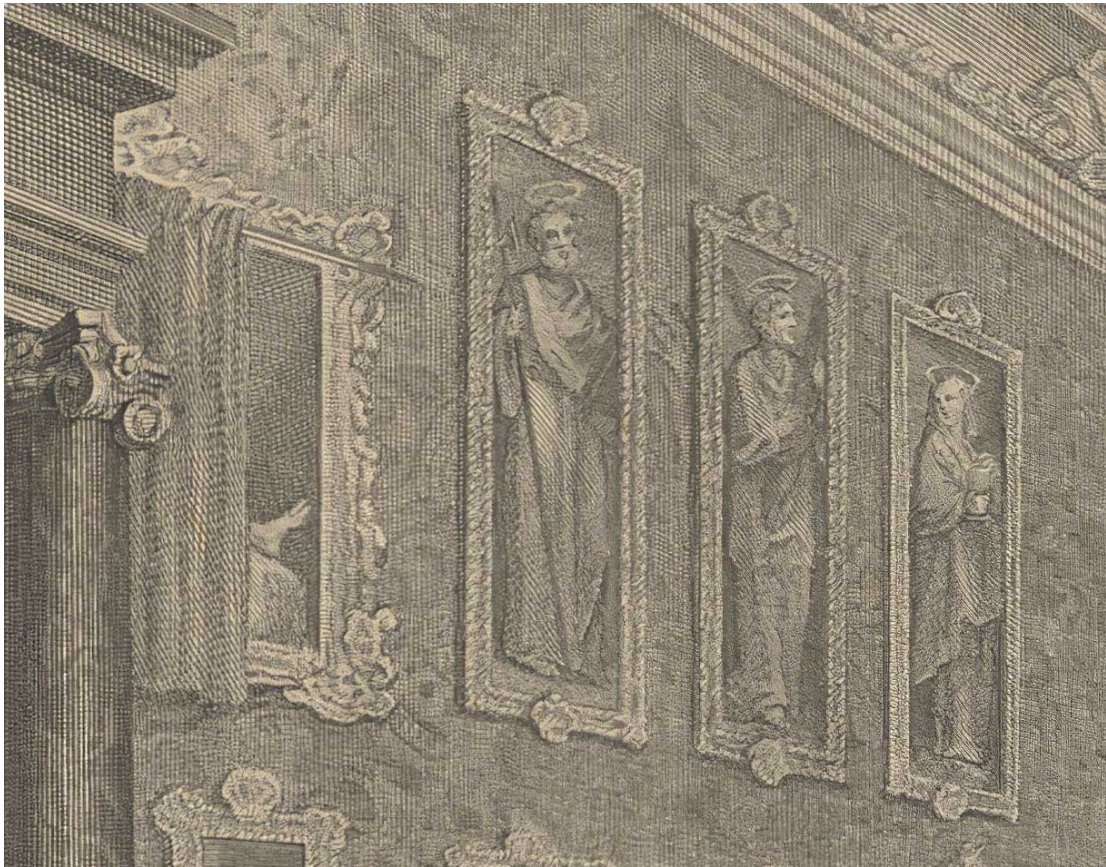




Plate 3. ***The Scene with the Quack.*** The husband has come to this chamber of medical horrors in search of a cure. The pillbox he holds toward the quack has not done its job, and he raises his cane as if with a playful threat. Evidently the little girl who stands between his legs is infected. She dabs a sore on her lip, and her ageless face may hint that she is not as young and pure as she looks. Her cap resembles the cap in Plate 2; she is the husband's mistress. Perhaps the beauty spot on his neck also covers a sore. The bowlegged Monsieur de la Pillule comfortably wipes his glasses; he has seen all this before. Between the two men an angry woman, fortified by a massive hoop skirt, opens a knife. She may be the wife of the quack, defending her man, or else a bawd who resents the charge that her girls are damaged goods. Medical oddities and monstrosities clutter the room, along with portents of death. The viscount's cane points to a cabinet where a wigged head looks at a skeleton that seems to be groping a cadaver; the tripod above evokes a gallows tree. At the far left, in

front of a laboratory door, are two of the doctor's inventions: machines for setting bones and uncorking bottles. Their similarity to instruments of torture hints at how useful the doctor's assistance will be.

---





Plate 4. ***The Countess's Levee.*** In her bedchamber at rising (*levée*; French), the countess receives some guests and puts on a show. Her husband is now earl (note the coronets), and they have a child (note the rattle on her chair). While a hairdresser curls her locks, she hangs on the words of Silvertongue, who makes himself at home (note his portrait on the upper right wall). Tonight they will be going to a masquerade ball, like the one on the screen he gestures toward; his left hand holds the tickets. At the far right a puffy, bedizened castrato sings, accompanied by a flute. His audience includes a self-absorbed dandy in curl-papers; a man who appreciatively smirks and opens his hand, from which a fan dangles; a snoring husband, holding his riding-crop like a baton; and his enraptured wife, who leans forward as if about to swoon. Unobserved by the others, a Black servant, bearing a cup of chocolate, smiles in amazement at these precious airs. At the lower left another black servant, a boy in a turban, grins at gewgaws purchased at an auction. His finger points both to Actaeon's horns, the sign of a cuckold, and to the couple as they



arrange their tryst. Wall paintings illustrate unnatural sex: Lot's seduction by his daughters, Jupiter embracing Io, and the rape of Ganymede.

---





Plate 5. ***The Death of the Earl.*** The melodramatic tableau at the center, as the earl totters toward death and the countess kneels to beg forgiveness, imitates paintings of Christ descending from the cross while Mary Magdalen mourns. But the surroundings are sordid. At a house of ill repute, the Turk's Head Bagnio, the countess and Silvertongue have been surprised in bed. The earl has broken in (key and socket on the floor) and drawn his sword, and the lawyer has run him through. As the horrified owner and constable enter, under a watchman's lantern, the killer, still in his nightshirt, flees through a window. A fire, outside the picture on the lower right, casts lurid light on the victim; the shadow of the tongs encircles the murder weapon. Costumed as a nun and friar, the lovers have come from a masquerade, and their discarded masks and clothes show they were in haste. Pills (presumably mercury, prescribed for venereal disease) have spilled from an overturned table on the right, beside an advertisement for the bagnio, a corset, and a bundle of

firewood. The portrait of a streetwalker, a squirrel perched on her hand, leers over the countess; on the wall behind the earl an uplifted blade is about to sever a child, in the Judgment of Solomon. At the top left St. Luke, the patron of artists, inscribes these transgressions.

---

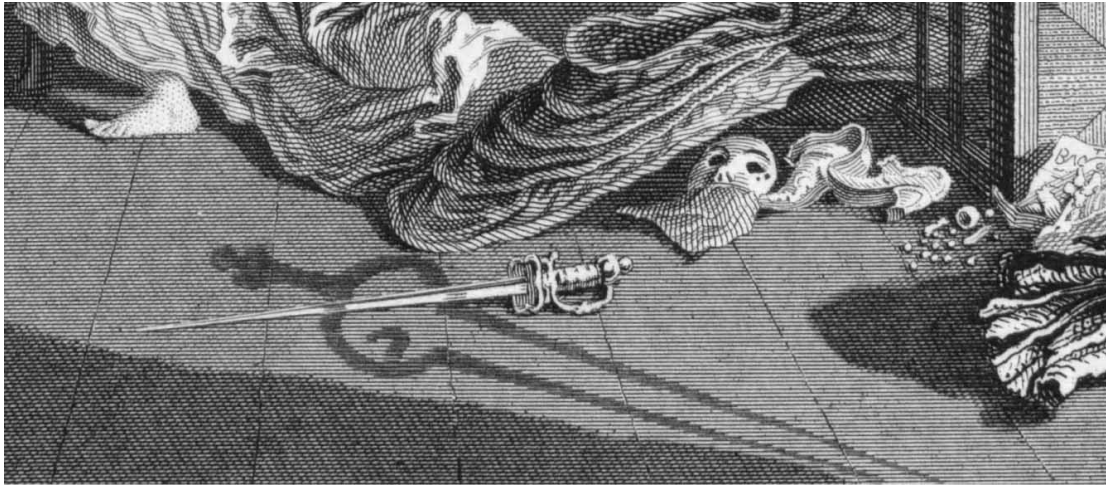




Plate 6. ***The Death of the Countess.*** "Counsellor Silvertongues Last Dying Speech," a paper on the floor announces, and a bottle of laudanum has dropped beside it. News of her lover's execution has driven the countess to poison herself. Slumped in a chair, she is already dead; on the far right a doctor steals away. Her father calmly slides the ring from her finger. This is his house; a window with cobwebs and broken panes opens on London Bridge, in the heart of the City. No luxury here. The furnishings are sparse, the floor is bare, and the dining table holds only one egg and a few leftovers, including a pathetic boar's head from which a starving hound is tearing scraps. The art is equally cheap: a pissing boy, a jumbled still life, a pipe set alight by the glowing nose of a drunk. At the center, beneath a coatrack, a stout apothecary (stomach pump and julep in his pocket) points toward the empty bottle in reproof and pokes the servant who brought it—an idiot wearing a coat many sizes too large, the merchant's hand-me-down. The service staff is completed by a withered old woman who holds out the countess's



little child for one last hug and kiss. But the mark on the child's cheek and the brace on its leg imply that disease has passed to the next generation. This noble family will have no heir.

---



# JAMES THOMSON

## 1700–1748

James Thomson, the most popular nature poet of the eighteenth century, did not see London until he was twenty-five years old. He grew up in the picturesque border country of Roxboroughshire in Scotland and, after studying divinity in Edinburgh, went to London in 1725, bringing with him, in addition to a memory well stored with images of the external world, the earliest version of his descriptive poem "Winter" in 405 lines of blank verse. Published in 1726, it soon became popular. Thomson went on to publish "Summer" (1727), "Spring" (1728), and "Autumn" in the first collected edition of *The Seasons* (1730), to which he added the "Hymn to the Seasons." During the next sixteen years, through constant revisions and additions, the poem grew in length to 5,541 lines. *The Seasons* continued to be popular well into the Romantic period; between 1730 and 1800 it was printed fifty times. Thomson's last poem, *The Castle of Indolence* (1748), is a witty imitation of Spenser; it moves from a playful portrait of the idleness of the poet and his friends to a celebration of industry and progress.

*The Seasons* set the fashion for the poetry of natural description. Generations of readers learned to look at the external world through Thomson's eyes and with the emotions that he had taught them to feel. The eye dominates the literature of external nature during the eighteenth century as the *imagination* was to do in the poetry of William Wordsworth. And Thomson amazed his readers by his

capacity to see: the general effects of light and cloud and foliage or the particular image of a leaf tossed in the gale or the slender feet of a robin or the delicate film of ice at the edge of a brook. He tries to view each season from every perspective, as it might be perceived by a bird in the sky or by the tiniest insect, by God or a painter or Milton or Sir Isaac Newton (whom Thomson commemorated in a popular ode). As the poem grew, it became an *omnium gatherum* of contemporary ideas and interests: natural history; ideas about the nature of man and society, primitive and civilized; the conception of created nature as a source of religious experience, as an object of religious veneration, and as a continuing revelation of a Creator whose presence fills the world.

# ***From The Seasons***

## **From *Autumn***

[EVENING AND NIGHT]<sup>1</sup>

The western sun withdraws the shortened day;  
And humid evening, gliding o'er the sky,  
In her chill progress, to the ground condensed  
The vapors throws. Where creeping waters ooze,  
1085 Where marshes stagnate, and where rivers wind,  
Cluster the rolling fogs, and swim along  
The dusky-mantled lawn. Meanwhile the moon,  
Full-orbed and breaking through the scattered  
clouds,  
Shows her broad visage in the crimsoned east.  
1090 Turned to the sun direct, her spotted disk  
(Where mountains rise, umbrageous dales descend,<sup>2</sup>  
And caverns deep, as optic tube<sup>o</sup> describes)  
A smaller earth, gives all his blaze again,  
Void of its flame, and sheds a softer day.  
1095 Now through the passing cloud she seems to stoop,  
Now up the pure cerulean rides sublime.  
Wide the pale deluge<sup>o</sup> floats, and streaming mild  
O'er the skied<sup>3</sup> mountain to the shadowy vale,  
While rocks and floods reflect the quivering gleam,  
1100 The whole air whitens with a boundless tide  
Of silver radiance trembling round the world.  
But when, half blotted from the sky, her light  
Fainting, permits the starry fires to burn  
With keener luster through the depth of heaven;  
1105 Or quite extinct her deadened orb appears,

And scarce appears, of sickly beamless white;  
 Oft in this season, silent from the north  
 A blaze of meteors<sup>4</sup> shoots—ensweeping first  
 The lower skies, they all at once converge  
 1110 High to the crown<sup>5</sup> of heaven, and, all at once  
 Relapsing quick, as quickly reascend,  
 And mix and thwart,<sup>o</sup> extinguish and renew,  
 All ether coursing<sup>6</sup> in a maze of light.  
 From look to look, contagious through the crowd,  
 1115 The panic runs, and into wondrous shapes  
 The appearance throws—armies in meet<sup>o</sup> array,  
 Thronged with aerial spears and steeds of fire;  
 Till, the long lines of full-extended war  
 In bleeding fight commixed, the sanguine flood  
 1120 Rolls a broad slaughter o’er the plains of heaven.  
 As thus they scan the visionary scene,  
 On all sides swells the superstitious din,  
 Incontinent; and busy frenzy talks  
 Of blood and battle; cities overturned,  
 1125 And late at night in swallowing earthquake sunk,  
 Or hideous wrapped in fierce ascending flame;  
 Of sallow famine, inundation, storm;  
 Of pestilence, and every great distress;  
 Empires subversed,<sup>o</sup> when ruling fate has struck  
 1130 The unalterable hour; even nature’s self  
 Is deemed to totter on the brink of time.  
 Not so the man of philosophic eye  
 And inspect sage:<sup>o</sup> the waving brightness he  
 Curious surveys, inquisitive to know  
 1135 The causes and materials, yet unfixed,<sup>7</sup>  
 Of this appearance beautiful and new.  
 Now black and deep the night begins to fall,  
 A shade immense! Sunk in the quenching gloom,  
 Magnificent and vast, are heaven and earth.  
 1140 Order confounded lies, all beauty void,

Distinction lost, and gay variety  
 One universal blot—such the fair power  
 Of light to kindle and create the whole.  
 Drear is the state of the benighted wretch  
 1145 Who then bewildered wanders through the dark  
 Full of pale fancies and chimeras<sup>o</sup> huge;  
 Nor visited by one directive ray  
 From cottage streaming or from airy hall.  
 Perhaps, impatient as he stumbles on,  
 1150 Struck from the root of slimy rushes, blue  
 The wildfire<sup>8</sup> scatters round, or, gathered, trails  
 A length of flame deceitful o'er the moss;  
 Whither decoyed by the fantastic blaze,  
 Now lost and now renewed, he sinks absorbed,  
 1155 Rider and horse, amid the miry gulf—  
 While still, from day to day, his pining wife  
 And plaintive children his return await,  
 In wild conjecture lost. At other times,  
 Sent by the better genius of the night,  
 1160 Innoxious,<sup>o</sup> gleaming on the horse's mane,  
 The meteor<sup>9</sup> sits, and shows the narrow path  
 That winding leads through pits of death, or else  
 Instructs him how to take the dangerous ford.  
 The lengthened night elapsed, the morning  
 1165 shines  
 Serene, in all her dewy beauty bright,  
 Unfolding fair the last autumnal day.  
 And now the mounting sun dispels the fog;  
 The rigid hoarfrost melts before his beam;  
 And, hung on every spray, on every blade  
 1170 Of grass, the myriad dewdrops twinkle round.

- Note 1: This passage, like many in *The Seasons*, went through extensive revisions. The opening lines on the harvest moon shining through fog (1082–1102) originally belonged to “Winter”; the descriptions of the aurora borealis (1108–37) and wildfire (1150–64) first appeared in “Summer.” Scientific and visionary, divine and human perspectives are contrasted and join together in an intricate harmony.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Observation of the moon had revealed shadows (“umbrageous dales”), hence an irregular surface.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, seeming to touch the sky.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Not meteors as we think of them, but the aurora borealis, or northern lights (multicolored, streaming pulses of light in the upper atmosphere). The aurora had often been associated with cosmic battles, in both literature and popular superstition.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The corona or central ring of the aurora.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Running through all the upper sky.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Unexplained by science.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Will-o’-the-wisp or ignis fatuus, a flitting phosphorescent light thought to kindle from the gas of decaying swamp grasses (“slimy rushes”).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The ignis lambens, or St. Elmo’s fire, a halo of light that shines on the tips of certain objects during electrical storms.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- °: *telescope*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *moonlight*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cross*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fitting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *overthrown*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wise examination*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *imaginary monsters*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *harmless*[Return to reference](#) °



# STEPHEN DUCK

## 1705–1756

Decades before Thomas Gray's famous speculation appeared in "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (see [p. 899](#)) that "some mute inglorious Milton" (line 59) may be hidden among the nation's working people, a writer of natural, untutored literary talent made his voice heard in Britain's literary landscape. Stephen Duck, the most celebrated laboring-class poet of the century, attended a charity school until the age of fourteen, and as he worked as an agricultural laborer by day, by night he read Milton, Dryden, the *Spectator*, Matthew Prior, and other literature. By 1729 he had begun writing the poems that would make him first a Wiltshire celebrity, then a national one. A pirated edition of three of his poems appeared in 1730 and went through ten editions in that year alone. The volume, which included "The Thresher's Labor," advertised Duck's wages for that job on the title page ("four shillings and six pence per week") and gained him the nickname the "Thresher Poet." That year, he came to the attention of Queen Caroline, who gave him an annuity and a house, and eventually various official posts; after Caroline's death he studied successfully to become a clergyman. But his transformed life did not bring him satisfaction, and he killed himself by drowning in a river behind a tavern.

It is from the 1730 edition that our text is taken. Duck was unhappy with the pirated texts and put out an authorized *Poems on Several Occasion* in 1736, but the language of the earlier version is

fresher and more direct, though it still exhibits his high literary ambitions. He alludes to classical mythology and motifs and (skeptically) to pastoral conventions, and carefully structures "The Thresher's Labor" to follow the seasons of the year, as experienced by farm workers. (Duck consistently uses the pronoun *we* to position himself as part of a laboring collective, switching to *I* only when making literary comparisons.) The work is primarily threshing—using a flail inside the barns to separate grain from its stalks—but includes winnowing (separating grain from chaff by dropping it and letting air blow the chaff away, also done indoors), haymaking, and reaping (cutting the crop in the fields at harvest). Duck provides an artful, vivid record of what such a life is like, physically and psychologically. While there are moments of enjoyment, including appreciation of natural beauty, interludes of celebration and rest, and the rhythmic, somatic pleasures of hard work, Duck's poem mostly represents a life of "endless toils," disappointments, noise, sweat, and exhaustion: any instance of relief from these seems little more than a deception. An unnamed "master," a farmer threatened himself by a landlord demanding rent, exerts consistent pressure, declaring his demands and satisfactions with an eye fixed on productivity. The labor exploited to maintain and increase it, Duck wanly concludes, will never end.

Duck was the most prominent and among the first of many laboring-class poets in the eighteenth century who gave the reading public poetically memorable accounts of their lives and work, including Mary Collier (see [p. 736](#)), who directly responded to his disparaging comments in "The Thresher's Labor" about "prattling females." Other notable poets who describe women's work first hand include Mary Leapor (see [p. 769](#)), and Ann Yearsley, the "Milkmaid Poet" (see [p. 1038](#)). Sponsored and condescended to by wealthy patrons, often seen as mere curiosities or tools of the elite in the period's literary culture, these authors speak in vigorous, singular voices heard for the first time in literature, of experiences shared by multitudes of working people, and inaugurate a tradition of laboring-

class writing that would transform the literary, social, and political consciousness of the nation.

## The Thresher's Labor

The grateful tribute of these rural lays,  
Which to her patron's hand<sup>1</sup> the muse conveys,  
Deign to accept: 'tis just she tribute bring  
To him whose bounty gives her life to sing:  
To him whose generous favors tune her voice;  
5 And bid her 'midst her poverty, rejoice.  
Inspired by these, she dares herself prepare,  
To sing the toils of each revolving year:  
Those endless toils which always grow anew,  
And the poor thresher's destined to pursue:  
10 Ev'n these with pleasure can the muse rehearse,  
When you, and gratitude, command the verse.  
Soon as the harvest hath laid bare the plains,  
And barns well filled reward the farmer's pains;  
What corn<sup>o</sup> each sheaf will yield, intent to hear,  
15 And guess from thence the profits of the year;  
Or else impending ruin to prevent,  
By paying, timely, threatening landlord's rent,  
He calls his threshers forth: around we stand,  
With deep attention waiting his command.  
20 To each our tasks he readily divides,  
And pointing, to our different stations guides.  
As he directs, to different barns we go;  
Here two for wheat, and there for barley two.  
But first, to show what he expects to find,  
25 These words, or words like these, disclose his mind:  
"So dry the corn was carried from the field,  
So easily will thresh, so well 'twill yield.  
Sure large day's work I well may hope for now;  
Come, strip, and try, let's see what you can do."  
30 Divested of our clothes, with flail in hand,

At a just distance, front to front<sup>o</sup> we stand;  
And first the threshall's<sup>o</sup> gently swung, to prove  
Whether with just exactness it will move:  
That once secure,<sup>o</sup> more quick we whirl them round,  
35 From the strong planks our crab-tree staves  
rebound,  
And echoing barns return the rattling sound.  
Now in the air our knotty weapons fly;  
And now with equal force descend from high:  
Down one, one up, so well they keep the time,  
40 The Cyclops' hammers could not truer chime;  
Nor with more heavy strokes could Aetna groan,  
When Vulcan forged the arms for Thetis' son.<sup>2</sup>  
In briny streams our sweat descends apace,  
Drops from our locks, or trickles down our face.  
45 No intermission in our works we know;  
The noisy threshall must for ever go.  
Their master absent, others safely play;  
The sleeping threshall doth itself betray.  
Nor yet the tedious labor to beguile,  
50 And make the passing minutes sweetly smile.  
Can we, like shepherds, tell a merry tale;<sup>3</sup>  
The voice is lost, drowned by the noisy flail.  
But we may think—Alas! what pleasing thing  
Here to the mind can the dull fancy bring?  
55 The eye beholds no pleasant object here;  
No cheerful sound diverts the listening ear.  
The shepherd well may tune his voice to sing,  
Inspired by all the beauties of the spring.  
No fountains murmur here, no lambkins play,  
60 No linnets warble, and no fields look gay.  
'Tis all a dull and melancholy scene,  
Fit only to provoke the muses' spleen.<sup>o</sup>  
When sooty peas we thresh,<sup>4</sup> you scarce can know  
Our native color, as from work we go;  
65

The sweat, the dust, and suffocating smoke,  
Make us so much like Ethiopians look:  
We scare our wives, when evening brings us home;  
And frightened infants think the bugbear<sup>5</sup> come.  
Week after week we this dull task pursue,  
70 Unless when winnowing days produce a new;  
A new indeed, but frequently a worse,  
The threshall yields but to the master's curse:  
He counts the bushels, counts how much a day,  
Then swears we've idled half our time away.  
75 "Why look ye, rogues! D'ye think that this will do?  
Your neighbors thresh as much again<sup>o</sup> as you."  
Now in our hands we wish our noisy tools,  
To drown the hated names of rogues and fools;  
But wanting<sup>o</sup> those, we just like schoolboys look,  
80 When th'angry master views the blotted book:  
They cry their ink was faulty, and their pen;  
We, the corn threshes bad, 'twas cut too green.  
But now the winter hides his hoary head,  
And nature's face is with new beauty spread;  
85 The spring appears, and kind refreshing showers  
New clothe the field with grass, and deck with  
flowers.  
Next her, the ripening summer presses on,  
And Sol<sup>o</sup> begins his longest stage to run:  
Before the door our welcome master stands,  
90 And tells us the ripe grass requires our hands.<sup>6</sup>  
The long much-wished intelligence<sup>o</sup> imparts  
Life to our looks, and spirits to our hearts:  
We wish the happy season may be fair,  
And, joyful, long to breathe in opener air.  
95 This change of labor seems to give much ease;<sup>7</sup>  
With thoughts of happiness our joy's complete,  
There's always bitter mingled with the sweet.  
When morn does through the eastern windows peep,

100 Straight from our beds we start, and shake off sleep;  
This new employ with eager haste to prove,<sup>o</sup>  
This new employ becomes so much our love:  
Alas! that human joys should change so soon,  
Even this may bear another face at noon!  
The birds salute<sup>o</sup> us as to work we go,  
105 And a new life seems in our breasts to glow.  
Across one's shoulder hangs a scythe well steeled,  
The weapon destined to unclothe the field:  
T'other supports the whetstone, scrip,<sup>o</sup> and beer;  
This for our scythes, and these ourselves to cheer.  
110 And now the field designed our strength to try,  
Appears, and meets at last our longing eye;  
The grass and ground each cheerfully surveys,  
Willing to see which way th'advantage lays.  
As the best man, each claims the foremost place,  
115 And our first work seems but a sportive race:  
With rapid force our well-whet blades we drive,  
Strain every nerve, and blow for blow we give:  
Though but this eminence<sup>o</sup> the foremost gains,  
Only t'excel the rest in toil and pains.  
120 But when the scorching sun is mounted high,  
And no kind barns with friendly shades are nigh,  
Our weary scythes entangle in the grass,  
And streams of sweat run trickling down apace;  
Our sportive labor we too late lament,  
125 And wish that strength again, we vainly spent:  
Thus in the morn a courser<sup>o</sup> have I seen  
With headlong fury scour<sup>o</sup> the level green,  
Or mount the hills, if hills are in his way,  
As if no labor could his fire<sup>o</sup> allay,  
130 Till the meridian<sup>o</sup> sun with sultry heat,  
And piercing beams hath bathed his sides in sweat;  
The lengthened chase scarce able to sustain,  
He measures back the hills and dales with pain.  
With heat and labor tired, our scythes we quit,

135 Search out a shady tree, and down we sit;  
From scrip and bottle hope new strength to gain;  
But scrip and bottle too are tried in vain.  
Down our parched throats we scarce the bread can  
get;  
And, quite o'erspent with toil, but faintly eat;  
140 Nor can the bottle only answer all,  
Alas! the bottle and the beer's too small.<sup>8</sup>  
Our time slides on, we move from off the grass;  
And each again betakes him to his place.  
Not eager now, as late, our strength to prove,  
145 But all contented regular to move:  
Often we whet, as often view the sun,  
To see how near his tedious race is run;  
At length he veils his radiant face from sight,  
And bids the weary traveler goodnight:  
150 Homewards we move, but so much spent with toil,  
We walk but slow, and rest at every stile.<sup>9</sup>  
Our good expecting wives, who think we stay,<sup>o</sup>  
Got to the door, soon eye us in the way;  
Then from the pot the dumpling's catch'd in haste,  
155 And homely by its side the bacon's placed.  
Supper and sleep by morn new strength supply,  
And out we set again our works to try:  
But not so early quite, nor quite so fast,  
As to our cost<sup>o</sup> we did the morning past.  
160 Soon as the rising sun has drank the dew,  
Another scene is opened to our view;  
Our master comes, and at his heels a throng  
Of prattling females, armed with rake and prong:<sup>o</sup>  
Prepared, whilst he is here, to make his hay;  
165 Or, if he turns his back, prepared to play.  
But here, or gone, sure of this comfort still,  
Here's company, so they may chat their fill:  
And were their hands as active as their tongues,



170 How nimbly then would move their rakes and  
prongs?  
The grass again is spread upon the ground,  
Till not a vacant place is to be found;  
And while the piercing sunbeams on it shine,  
The haymakers have time allowed to dine:  
175 That soon dispatched, they still sit on the ground,  
And the brisk chat renewed, afresh goes round:  
All talk at once, but seeming all to fear,  
That all they speak so well, the rest won't hear;  
By quick degrees so high their notes they strain,  
That standers-by can naught distinguish plain:  
180 So loud their speech, and so confused their noise,  
Scarce puzzled Echo<sup>1</sup> can return a voice;  
Yet, spite of this, they bravely all go on,  
Each scorns to be, or seem to be, outdone:  
Till (unobserved before) a lowering sky,  
185 Fraught with black clouds, proclaims a shower nigh;  
The tattling crowd can scarce their garments gain,  
Before descends the thick impetuous rain:  
Their noisy prattle all at once is done,  
And to the hedge they all for shelter run.

190 Thus have I seen on a bright summer's day,  
On some green brake<sup>o</sup> a flock of sparrows play;  
From twig to twig, from bush to bush they fly;  
And with continued chirping fill the sky;  
But on a sudden, if a storm appears,  
195 Their chirping noise no longer dings your ears;  
They fly for shelter to the thickest bush,  
There silent sit, and all at once is hush.  
But better fate succeeds this rainy day,  
And little labor serves to make the hay;  
200 Fast as 'tis cut, so kindly shines the sun,  
Turned once or twice, the pleasing work is done:  
Next day the cocks<sup>o</sup> appear in equal rows,

Which the glad master in safe ricks<sup>o</sup> bestows.

205 But now the field we must no longer range,  
And yet, hard fate! still work for work we change.  
Back to the barns again in haste we're sent,  
Where lately so much time we pensive spent:  
Not pensive now; we bless the friendly shade;  
And to avoid the parching sun are glad.  
210 But few days here we're destined to remain,  
Before our master calls us forth again:  
"For harvest now," says he, "yourselves prepare,  
The ripened harvest now demands your care.  
Early next morn I shall disturb your rest.  
215 Get all things ready, and be quickly drest."  
Strict to his word, scarce the next dawn appears,  
Before his hasty summons fills our ears.  
Obedient to his call, straight up we get,  
And finding soon our company complete;  
220 With him, our guide, we to the wheat field go;  
He, to appoint, and we, the work to do.  
Ye reapers, cast your eyes around the field,  
And view the scene its different beauties yield:  
Then look again with a more tender eye,  
225 To think how soon it must in ruin lie.  
For once set in, where-e'er our blows we deal,  
There's no resisting of the well-whet steel:  
But here or there, where-e'er our course we bend,  
Sure desolation does our steps attend.  
230 Thus, when Arabia's sons, in hopes of prey,  
To some more fertile country take their way;  
How beauteous all things in the morn appear,  
There villages, and pleasing cots<sup>o</sup> are here;  
So many pleasing objects meet the sight,  
235 The ravished eye could willing gaze till night:  
But long ere then, where-e'er their troops have past,  
These pleasing prospects lie a gloomy waste.

The morning past, we sweat beneath the sun,  
And but uneasily our work goes on.  
240 Before us we perplexing<sup>o</sup> thistles find,  
And corn blown adverse with the ruffling wind;  
Behind our backs the female gleaners<sup>2</sup> wait,  
Who sometimes stoop, and sometimes hold a chat.  
Each morn we early rise, go late to bed,  
245 And laboring hard, a painful life we lead:  
For toils, scarce ever ceasing, press us now;  
Rest never does, but on the Sabbath, show,  
And barely that, our master will allow.  
Nor, when asleep, are we secure from pain,  
250 We then perform our labors o'er again:  
Our mimic fancy always restless seems;  
And what we act awake, she acts in dreams.  
Hard fate! Our labors ev'n in sleep don't cease,  
Scarce Hercules e'er felt such toils as these.<sup>3</sup>  
255 At length in rows stands up the well-dried corn,  
A grateful scene, and ready for the barn.  
Our well-pleased master views the sight with joy,  
And we for carrying all our force employ.  
Confusion soon o'er all the field appears,  
260 And stunning clamors fill the workmen's ears;  
The bells, and clashing whips, alternate sound,  
And rattling wagons thunder o'er the ground.  
The wheat got in, the peas, and other grain,  
Share the same fate, and soon leave bare the plain:  
265 In noisy triumph the last load moves on,  
And loud huzzahs proclaim the harvest done.  
Our master joyful at the welcome sight,  
Invites us all to feast with him at night.  
A table plentifully spread we find,  
270 And jugs of humming<sup>o</sup> beer to cheer the mind;  
Which he, too generous, pushes on so fast,  
We think no toils to come, nor mind the past.

But the next morning soon reveals the cheat,  
When the same toils we must again repeat:  
275 To the same barns again must back return,  
To labor there for room for next year's corn.

Thus, as the year's revolving course goes round,  
No respite from our labor can be found:  
280 Like Sisyphus,<sup>4</sup> our work is never done,  
Continually rolls back the restless stone.  
Now growing labors still succeed the past,  
And growing always new, must always last.

## Endnotes

1730, 1736

- Note 1: Hoby Stanley, rector of Pewsey, and his sister-in-law, Sarah Stanley, were two of Duck's early patrons. Stanley urged him to write about his life as a thresher, and the poem was dedicated to Stanley in the 1736 edition.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Thetis's son is Achilles, hero of Homer's *Iliad*. "Vulcan": Roman god identified with the Greek god Hephaestus, who made Achilles' shield in the volcano Mount Aetna, in Sicily. The Cyclops were Hephaestus's workmen. These lines echo a passage from the fourth of Virgil's *Georgics* (29 B.C.E.), which depict rural labor, as translated by Dryden.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Duck refers to themes conventional in pastoral poetry about the poetic leisure of shepherds' lives.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The black dust raised by peas and beans often led workers to thresh them outdoors, but Duck and his fellow workers still seem to be inside the barn.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Imaginary monster invoked to frighten children.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The laborers begin to cut grass in the fields for making hay (which women laborers will gather starting at line 164), welcoming the turn to outdoor work.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: An unrhymed line in the 1730 edition, the 1736 version closes the couplet and continues as follows: "This change of labor seems to give such ease, / With thoughts of happiness ourselves we please. / But, ah! how rarely's happiness complete! / There's always bitter mingled with the sweet."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Small beer has a low alcohol content, and the bottles are too small to hold much.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Steps over a fence.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In mythology, a mountain nymph doomed by Hera to repeat the words last spoken to her.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The gleaners' job was to gather the grain left by the reapers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The preeminent hero Hercules (Herakles in Greek) performed twelve extraordinary labors.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Legendary king of Ephyrā: for cheating death twice, he was condemned by Zeus to roll a boulder uphill only for it to roll back upon him as he neared the top, a sequence repeated throughout eternity.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *grain*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *face to face*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flail's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confirmed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *anger, sadness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *twice as much*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lacking*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the sun*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *news*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *try*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *greet*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lunch sack*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *honor*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *fast horse*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *run across quickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *spirit*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *noonday*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *linger, delay*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *disadvantage*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *pitchfork*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thicket*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *haycocks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *haystacks*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cottages*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *entangled*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *potent, frothy*[Return to reference](#) °

## MARY COLLIER

### ca. 1699–1762

Mary Collier, born to a poor family near the town of Midhurst in southern England, never went to school, but her parents taught her to read. Upon the death of her long-infirm father, she moved about ten miles away, “to Petersfield, where my chief employment was washing, brewing, and such labor, still devoting what leisure time I had to books,” as she reports in an autobiographical notice, published near the end of her life—virtually the sole source of information about her. A copy of Stephen Duck’s celebrated poem “The Thresher’s Labor” reached her in the early 1730s: it impressed and inspired but also provoked her, resulting in her composition of “The Woman’s Labor,” which rebuts Duck’s charge that women laborers do less work than men. Her poetry “became a town talk” among families in Petersfield, who encouraged her to publish it in 1739, though at her own expense; she hoped its novelty as the work of a woman poet of the laboring classes might make her some money. It did not, and she never gained a national reputation at all comparable to Duck’s. But in the last year of her life, she published another volume of poems, which included “The Woman’s Labor” and her brief autobiography, with a subscribers’ list of over 150 names.

Some of the excitement of “The Woman’s Labor” comes from its directness, its vivid description of all the different jobs rural working women do. Unlike Duck, who structures his poem around work demanded of agricultural laborers at different seasons of the year,

Collier depicts the workday, seemingly never-ending for rural women, whose fieldwork, childcare, domestic labor, and service to rich families blend together into a single stream. Also notable is Collier's close engagement with Duck and the details of his poem. The degrees of irony with which she addresses him and notes his spectacular success at the beginning and throughout are hard to measure. She questions his lines that directly insult women but also mockingly quotes those in which he complains about the supposedly supreme miseries of men laborers' working lives. And she speaks not just for herself but for an entire class of people, for all of "poor woman-kind," primarily using the pronoun *we*, like Duck. Her account of childcare in the fields, and care in the home for children and men, for instance, portrays a plight borne by women collectively, though what is known of her indicates that she never married or had children. (In her autobiography, she refers to herself as "an old maid.") The shared struggles of working women's lives, both inside and outside the formal economy of wages, are the real topic of "The Woman's Labor," which Collier surveys with relentless clarity.



# The Woman's Labor

## *To Mr. Stephen Duck*

Immortal bard! thou favorite of the nine!<sup>o</sup>  
Enriched by peers, advanced by Caroline!<sup>1</sup>  
Deign to look down on one that's poor and low,  
Remembering you yourself was lately so;  
5 Accept these lines: Alas! what can you have  
From her, who ever was, and's still a slave?  
No learning ever was bestowed on me;  
My life was always spent in drudgery:  
And not alone; alas! with grief I find,  
10 It is the portion<sup>o</sup> of poor woman-kind.  
Oft have I thought as on my bed I lay,  
Eased from the tiresome labors of the day,  
Our first extraction from a mass refined,<sup>2</sup>  
Could never be for slavery designed;  
15 Till time and custom by degrees destroyed  
That happy state<sup>o</sup> our sex at first enjoyed.  
When men had used their utmost care and toil,  
Their recompense was but a female smile;  
When they by arts or arms were rendered great,  
20 They laid their trophies at a woman's feet;  
They, in those days, unto our sex did bring  
Their hearts, their all, a free-will<sup>o</sup> offering;  
And as from us their being they derive,  
They back again should all due homage give.

25 Jove once descending from the clouds did drop  
In show'rs of gold on lovely Danae's lap;<sup>3</sup>  
The sweet-tongued poets, in those generous days,

Unto our shrine still offered up their lays:<sup>o</sup>  
But now, alas! that golden age is past,  
We are the objects of your scorn at last.  
30 And you, great Duck, upon whose happy brow  
The muses seem to fix the garland<sup>4</sup> now,  
In your late poem boldly did declare  
Alcides' labors can't with yours compare;<sup>5</sup>  
And of your annual task have much to say,  
35 Of threshing, reaping, mowing corn and hay;  
Boasting your daily toil, and nightly dream,  
But can't conclude your never-dying theme,  
And let our hapless sex in silence lie  
Forgotten, and in dark oblivion die;  
40 But on our abject state you throw your scorn,  
And women wrong, your verses to adorn.  
You of haymaking speak a word or two,  
As if our sex but little work could do:<sup>6</sup>  
This makes the honest farmer smiling say,  
45 He'll seek for women still to make his hay;  
For if his back be turned their work they mind  
As well as men, as far as he can find.  
For my own part, I many a summer's day  
Have spent in throwing, turning, making hay;  
50 But ne'er could see, what you have lately found,  
Our wages paid for sitting on the ground.<sup>7</sup>  
'Tis true, that when our morning's work is done,  
And all our grass exposed unto the sun,  
While that his scorching beams do on it shine,  
55 As well as you we have a time to dine:  
I hope, that since we freely toil and sweat  
To earn our bread, you'll give us time to eat.  
That over, soon we must get up again,  
And nimbly turn our hay upon the plain;  
60 Nay, rake and row it in, the case is clear;  
Or how should *Cocks in equal Rows appear?*<sup>8</sup>

But if you'd have what you have wrote believed,  
I find, that you to hear us talk are grieved:  
In this, I hope, you do not speak your mind,  
65 For none but Turks, that ever I could find,  
Have mutes to serve them,<sup>9</sup> or did e'er deny  
Their slaves, at work, to chat it merrily.  
Since you have liberty to speak your mind,  
And are to talk, as well as we, inclined,  
70 Why should you thus repine,<sup>o</sup> because that we,  
Like you, enjoy that pleasing liberty?  
What! would you lord it quite,<sup>o</sup> and take away  
The only privilege our sex enjoy?

75 When evening does approach, we homeward hie,  
<sup>o</sup>  
And our domestic toils incessant ply:  
Against<sup>o</sup> your coming home prepare to get  
Our work all done, our house in order set;  
*Bacon* and *Dumpling*<sup>1</sup> in the pot we boil,  
Our beds we make, our swine we feed the while;  
80 Then wait at door to see you coming home,  
And set the table out against you come:  
Early next morning we on you attend,  
Our children dress and feed, their clothes we mend;  
And in the field our daily task renew,  
85 Soon as the rising sun has dried the dew.

When harvest comes, into the field we go,  
And help to reap the wheat as well as you;  
Or else we go the ears of corn to glean;<sup>o</sup>  
No labor scorning, be it e'er so mean;<sup>o</sup>  
90 But in the work we freely bear a part,  
And what we can, perform with all our heart.  
To get a living we so willing are,  
Our tender babes into the field we bear,  
And wrap them in our clothes to keep them warm,

95 While round about we gather up the corn;  
And often unto them our course do bend,  
To keep them safe, that nothing them offend:  
Our children that are able, bear a share  
In gleaning corn, such is our frugal care.  
100 When night comes on, unto our home we go,  
Our corn we carry, and our infant too;  
Weary, alas! but 'tis not worth our while  
Once to complain, or *rest at ev'ry stile*;<sup>2</sup>  
We must make haste, for when we home are come,  
105 Alas! we find our work but just begun;  
So many things for our attendance call,  
Had we ten hands, we could employ them all.  
Our children put to bed, with greatest care  
We all things for your coming home prepare:  
110 You sup, and go to bed without delay,  
And rest yourselves till the ensuing day;  
While we, alas! but little sleep can have,  
Because our froward<sup>o</sup> children cry and rave;  
Yet, without fail, soon as daylight doth spring,  
115 We in the field again our work begin,  
And there, with all our strength, our toil renew,  
Till Titan's golden rays<sup>3</sup> have dried the dew;  
Then home we go unto our children dear,  
Dress, feed, and bring them to the field with care.  
120 Were this your case, you justly might complain  
That day nor night you are secure from pain;  
Those mighty troubles which perplex your mind  
(*Thistles* before, and *Females* come behind)<sup>4</sup>  
Would vanish soon, and quickly disappear,  
125 Were you, like us, encumbered thus with care.  
What you would have of us we do not know:  
We oft take up the corn that you do mow;  
We cut the peas, and always ready are,  
130 In every work to take our proper share;

And from the time that harvest doth begin,  
Until the corn be cut and carried in,  
Our toil and labor's daily so extreme,  
That we have hardly ever *Time to dream*.<sup>5</sup>

135       The harvest ended, respite none we find;  
The hardest of our toil is still behind:°  
Hard labor we most cheerfully pursue,  
And out, abroad, a charing° often go:  
Of which I now will briefly tell in part,  
140       What fully to declare is past my art;  
So many hardships daily we go through  
I boldly say, the like *you* never knew.

          When bright Orion glitters in the skies  
In winter nights, then early we must rise;  
The weather ne'er so° bad, wind, rain, or snow,  
145       Our work appointed, we must rise and go;  
While you on easy beds may lie and sleep,  
Till light does through your chamber windows peep.  
When to the house we come where we should go,  
How to get in, alas! we do not know:  
150       The maid quite tired with work the day before,  
O'ercome with sleep; we standing at the door  
Oppressed with cold, and often call in vain,  
Ere to our work we can admittance gain:  
But when from wind and weather we get in,  
155       Briskly with courage we our work begin;  
Heaps of fine linen we before us view,  
Whereon to lay our strength and patience too;  
Cambrics and muslins<sup>6</sup> which our ladies wear,  
Laces and edgings, costly, fine, and rare,  
160       Which must be washed with utmost skill and care;  
With Holland<sup>7</sup> shirts, ruffles and fringes too,  
Fashions which our forefathers never knew.  
For several hours here we work and slave,

165 Before we can one glimpse of daylight have;  
We labor hard before the morning's past,  
Because we fear the time runs on too fast.

At length bright Sol<sup>o</sup> illuminates the skies,  
And summons drowsy mortals to arise;  
Then comes our mistress to us without fail,  
170 And in her hand, *perhaps*, a mug of ale  
To cheer our hearts, and also to inform  
Herself what work is done that very morn;  
Lays her command upon us, that we mind  
Her linen well, nor *leave the dirt behind*:  
175 Nor this alone, but also to take care,  
We don't her cambrics nor her ruffles tear;  
And *these* most strictly does of us require,  
*To save her soap, and sparing be of fire*;  
Tells us her charge<sup>o</sup> is great, nay furthermore,  
180 Her clothes are fewer than the time before.  
Now we drive on, resolved our strength to try,  
And what we can, we do most willingly;  
Until with heat and work, 'tis often known,  
Not only sweat, but blood runs trickling down  
185 Our wrists and fingers; still our work demands  
The constant action of our laboring hands.

Now night comes on, from whence you have  
relief,  
But that, alas! does but increase our grief;  
With heavy hearts we often view the sun,  
190 Fearing he'll set before our work is done;  
For either in the morning, or at night,  
We piece<sup>o</sup> the summer's day with candlelight.  
Though we all day with care our work attend,  
Such is our fate, we know not when 'twill end:  
195 When evening's come, you homeward take your way,  
We, till our work is done, are forced to stay;

And after all our toil and labor past,  
*Six-pence* or *Eight-pence* pays us off at last;  
For all our pains, no prospect can we see  
200 Attend us, but old age and poverty.

The washing is not all we have to do:  
We oft change work for work as well as you,  
Our mistress of her pewter doth complain,  
And 'tis our part to make it clean again.  
205 This work, though very hard and tiresome too,  
Is not the worst we hapless females do:  
When night comes on, and we quite weary are,  
We scarce can count what falls unto our share;  
Pots, kettles, saucepans, skillets, we may see,  
210 Skimmers and ladles, and such trumpery,  
Brought in to make complete our slavery.  
Though early in the morning 'tis begun,  
'Tis often very late before we've done;  
Alas! our labors never know an end;  
215 On brass and iron we our strength must spend;  
Our tender hands and fingers scratch and tear:  
All this, and more, with patience we must bear.  
Colored with dirt and filth we now appear;  
Your threshing *sooty peas*<sup>8</sup> will not come near.  
220 All the perfections woman once could boast,  
Are quite obscured and altogether lost.

Once more our mistress sends to let us know  
She wants our help, because the beer runs low:  
Then in much haste for brewing we prepare,  
225 The vessels clean, and scald with greatest care;  
Often at midnight, from our bed we rise  
At other times, e'en *that* will not suffice;  
Our work at evening oft we do begin,  
And ere we've done, the night comes on again.  
230 Water we pump, the copper we must fill,

Or tend the fire; for if we e'er standing still,  
Like you, when threshing, we a watch must keep,  
Our wort<sup>9</sup> boils over, if we dare to sleep.

235 But to rehearse all labor is in vain,  
Of which we very justly might complain:  
For us, ye see, but little rest is found;  
Our toil increases as the year runs round.  
While you to Sisyphus yourselves compare,  
240 With Danaus' daughters<sup>1</sup> we may claim a share;  
For while he labors hard against the hill,  
Bottomless tubs of water they must fill.  
So the industrious bees do hourly strive,  
To bring their loads of honey to the hive;  
245 Their sordid<sup>o</sup> owners always reap the gains,  
And poorly recompense their toil and pains.

## Endnotes

1739

- Note 1: Queen Caroline, Duck's most exalted patron.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: God created humanity by refining the dust from which he made us.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Confined in a windowless, doorless chamber by her father, Danaë became impregnated by Zeus, king of the Greek gods, who transformed himself into a golden rain and flowed down upon her through a skylight.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A wreath of flowers worn on the head, symbol of poetic excellence.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See line 255 of "The Thresher's Labor," which compares threshers' labors to those of Hercules (also known as Alcides). "Late poem": the recent ("late") publication of the authorized edition of Duck's poem "The Thresher's Labor" appeared in 1736.[Return to reference 5](#)



- Note 6: Duck begins his derogatory comments about women workers making hay at line 163 of "The Thresher's Labor."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See "The Thresher's Labor," line 175.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Collier quotes "The Thresher's Labor," line 203.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Deaf people, called "mutes," were employed as servants in the court of the Ottoman Empire, a fact that 18th-century Britons often noted with interest.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See "The Thresher's Labor," lines 155–56.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Collier quotes "The Thresher's Labor," line 152.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The sun's rays. Homer calls the sun Titan after the Titan god Hyperion, though other Greek literature identifies the sun with Hyperion's son, Helios.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See "The Thresher's Labor," lines 241–43.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See "The Thresher's Labor," lines 252–53.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Light, plain-woven cotton fabrics. "Cambrics": fine white linens, first made in the town of Cambrai, in northern France.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A type of linen originally made in Holland.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See "The Thresher's Labor," lines 64–69.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "New beer either unfermented, or in the act of fermentation" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In Greek mythology, forty-nine of the fifty daughters of Danaus, king of Libya, killed their husbands on their wedding nights, on their father's orders. They were condemned in the underworld to carry water in leaky vessels that had to be ceaselessly refilled. "Sisyphus": another mythological figure

associated with an eternal, futile task; see “The Thresher’s Labor,” lines 280–81, and note. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *the Muses* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *allotment* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in Paradise* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *voluntary* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *songs* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *complain* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *entirely control* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hasten* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *In preparation for* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gather* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lowly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *unruly* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *to come* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *doing chores* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *no matter how* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the sun* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *expenses* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *supplement* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *self-interested, greedy* [Return to reference °](#)

# Women, Gender, Power

A new arena of power opened to women in Britain in the Restoration period and eighteenth century. As in earlier eras, careers in the church and the professions were closed to women; their legal rights in marriage were severely restricted; they could not vote in parliamentary elections or obtain a university education at Oxford or Cambridge or any of the Scottish universities. But they could write, and increasingly as the eighteenth century advanced, they published their work. Literacy was spreading ever more widely in Britain to include more and more men and women of every social station: an enlarged, diversifying literary marketplace began to crave the diversity of points of view, styles, innovations in genres, and insights that women authors could help provide. The late seventeenth-century career of Aphra Behn (1640?–1689) has long been seen as a watershed for the professional woman writer. Women who published their work before her were often aristocratic, with a level of education very rare for women outside the uppermost classes. Behn rose from obscurity and found a way to make a living as a playwright, novelist, and poet on her own (see [p. 145](#)). The next generation of women with literary careers, including Delarivier Manley (ca. 1670–1724) and Eliza Haywood (1693?–1756; see [p. 649](#)), published prose fiction, political scandal, translations, plays, periodical essays, poetry. These women often did piecework in the London milieu of writing for hire called Grub Street: they had to fight to make their way in a publishing industry dominated by men, and the financial returns they gained often amounted to barely enough to get by on. At the same time, women in the period made other models of authorship work for them: Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661–1720) composed her influential, celebrated poems on her country estate, at first choosing to circulate them only in manuscript (and later experimenting with the possibilities of print); women poets of the laboring classes such as Mary Collier (see [p.](#)

[736](#)), Mary Leapor (see below), and Ann Yearsley (see [p. 1038](#)) found interested patrons, who were often themselves women of higher social stations, and made some money selling their works by subscription. In the early 1750s, a group of women, some wealthy, some of the middling ranks, convened to form the Bluestocking circle, which emphasized women's intellectual, often scholarly achievement. There is no single profile or template of the woman author in the eighteenth century. Women writers were Tories and Whigs (and eventually, radicals), urban sophisticates and rural laborers, titled ladies and clergymen's daughters, pious and risqué, popular and erudite, producing satirical, devotional, amatory, and emotionally uplifting works—no single genre defined what a woman writer in the period should do.

In all their diversity, however, women authors of the period together offered innovative perspectives on gender and, exploring their own evolving social and cultural positions, helped forge powerful new political ideas. The institution of marriage, as long established in English common law, gave husbands control over the property, the lives, even the identities of their wives. Defining this doctrine, known as coverture, the English jurist William Blackstone (1723–1780) commented, “by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law, that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated into that of the husband.” Writers such as Mary Astell (see [p. 213](#)), Judith Drake (fl. 1696–1723), and Mary, Lady Chudleigh (see below) began to discuss this subordination not merely as a cultural tradition but as a political issue, using the same terms employed by men when they criticized unjust rulers. “If *all men are born free*, how is it that all women are born slaves?” asked Astell. In recognizing the political dimensions of private, domestic life, these women inaugurated modern feminism.

Gender politics touched women's literary works in less philosophically overt ways as well. For instance, Finch notes in “The Unequal Fetters” (see below) how conventional love lyrics as written by men deliberately fail to notice the jeopardy for women inherent in

wooing and marriage; and Mary Wortley Montagu's poetic answer to Jonathan Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room" is both a personal attack on him and a general satire on male insecurity and impotence—which tend to turn into aggression against women. When Montagu traveled to Turkey and wrote about Turkish social customs, including literature (see [p. 640](#)), she was exploring her own talents and intellectual interests; but she was also demonstrating to her correspondents (and later, when her travelog was published, to the world) the brilliance of observation and analysis that women could achieve. Women's poems, essays, and advice literature (such as the selection from Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* below) treat women's friendship as a crucial part of their intimate, daily experience; but they also document and help create solidarity among women, in a social world often indifferent or hostile to their needs, safety, and aspirations.

In the period, expanded understandings of women's cultural and social roles could also open up broader questions about the codes designed to fix sexuality and gender along heteronormative and cisgender lines. Aphra Behn's poem "To the Fair Clarinda" (see [p. 151](#)), written in a Restoration subculture that linked expansive sexual experience to sophistication and status, uses her desire for a person (at first) identified as a woman to question the nature of the gender binary; and the anonymous lyric "Cloe to Artimesa" (see below) rejects heterosexuality and celebrates sexual relationships between women in vigorous terms. But such unrestrictive views of sex and gender were far from normalized in eighteenth-century British culture. At midcentury, the case of Charles Hamilton illustrates the dangers faced by people whose gender identities did not conform to conventional demands. Hamilton was a transgender man (though that terminology did not exist at the time) who married several women. In *The Female Husband* (see below), the novelist Henry Fielding presents a semifictional account of Hamilton's story (changing his first name to George), endorsing the violence to which the legal system and society at large subjects him. But Fielding also challenges the norm, after a fashion, merely by showing the public

that real people with complex, gender-nonconforming identities exist; and he almost cannot help rooting for his protagonist. The culture's complex attitudes toward the gender binary are also illustrated by the popular success at midcentury of Hannah Snell, whose autobiography (written with her collaborator, Robert Walker; see below) describes her passing as a male marine to serve in Britain's imperial wars in India (and her delight in revealing herself to her comrades as a woman when her service ended). Snell could cross gender lines as a British military hero and be applauded, though the codes surrounding sexuality and gender subtly dictated how her story had to be told for the public to accept it.

Gender and sexuality were pressing, personal topics, explored in writing by men and women alike. But just like their male counterparts, women authors of the long eighteenth century wrote about far more than gender and sexuality. They translated and interpreted ancient philosophers like Epictetus and analyzed new developments in natural science; they warmly professed their Christian faith and engaged in bitter party politics. And many women authors, such as Hannah More (see [p. 976](#)), came to assert their allegiance to what they conceived as traditional gender roles, anticipating ideologies of feminine domesticity that would emerge in the nineteenth century. But the unignorable fact of women's authorship itself transformed and enhanced the authority of women in British culture. Though often dismissed and marginalized by men throughout the period, women, in their individuality and range of diverse interests, were now heard.

## ANNE FINCH, COUNTESS OF WINCHILSEA

Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (see [p. 199](#)), could be a clear-eyed critic of the difficult predicament of married women, in poems like “The Unequal Fetters.” But also, as is evident in poems like “A Letter to Dafnis,” she thrived in her own marriage, and her husband eagerly supported her writing. The texts of the two following poems are based on the 1903 edition by Myra Reynolds of poems included in Finch’s carefully produced, handwritten folio of poetry, which has been dated to around 1702. This folio contains poems that later appeared in her 1713 printed collection *Miscellany Poems, On Several Occasions*, but also ones—like these—that she only circulated in manuscript form.

# The Unequal Fetters

5      Could we stop the time that's flying  
         Or recall it when 'tis past,  
         Put far off the day of dying  
         Or make youth forever last,  
         To love would then be worth our cost.<sup>1</sup>

10      But since we must lose those graces  
         Which at first your hearts have won,  
         And you seek for in new faces  
         When our spring of life is done,  
         It would but urge our ruin on.

15      Free as nature's first intention  
         Was to make us, I'll be found,  
         Nor by subtle man's invention  
         Yield to be in fetters bound  
         By one that walks a freer round.

20      Marriage does but slightly tie men  
         Whilst close<sup>o</sup> prisoners we remain:  
         They the larger slaves of Hymen<sup>2</sup>  
         Still are begging love again  
         At the full length of all their chain.

## Endnotes

1702?

- Note 1: Finch subverts the familiar conceit of *carpe diem* (Latin, "seize the day"), in which male poets try to persuade young women to enjoy sexual love now because time cannot stand still.[Return to reference 1](#)



- Note 2: Greek god of marriage and weddings. “Larger slaves”: those bound in marriage but allowed to be “at large,” with more freedom of movement. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *tightly held* [Return to reference °](#)

## A Letter to Dafnis April 2d 1685<sup>1</sup>

This to the crown and blessing of my life,  
The much loved husband of a happy wife.  
To him, whose constant passion found the art<sup>o</sup>  
To win a stubborn and ungrateful heart,  
And to the world by tenderest proof discovers<sup>o</sup>  
5 They err, who say that husbands can't be lovers.  
With such return of passion as is due,  
Daphnis I love, Daphnis my thoughts pursue,  
Daphnis, my hopes, my joys, are bounded all in you:  
Even I, for Daphnis' and my promise's sake,  
10 What I in women censure, undertake.  
But this from love, not vanity, proceeds;  
You know who writes, and I who 'tis that reads.  
Judge not my passion by my want<sup>o</sup> of skill:  
Many love well, though they express it ill;  
15 And I your censure could with pleasure bear,  
Would you but soon return, and speak it here.

### Endnotes

1702?

- Note 1: Included in Finch's folio, this poem also appears in a manuscript where it is titled "A Letter to Daphnis from Westminster, Ap: the 2d, 1685," with "Mr. Finch" (that is, Finch's husband, Heneage) written in and partially erased, and the name "Daphnis" inserted in its place. [Return to reference 1](#)

### Notes

- °: *enlightened skill* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shows* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *lack* [Return to reference](#) °

## MARY, LADY CHUDLEIGH

With one of the most vigorous voices among women poets of the Restoration and early eighteenth century, Mary, Lady Chudleigh (1656–1710) published books of poems and essays, including the long poem in dialogue *The Ladies Defence* (1701), which attacked the view that women owe their husbands total submission. She wrote on many topics, especially the friendships she formed with other women writers, including Mary Astell (1666–1731), Elizabeth Thomas (1675–1731), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), and Judith Drake (ca. 1670–1723). Though she did not write in detail about her own experience in her marriage to Sir George Chudleigh (d. 1718), which began in 1674 and produced six children, her work argues consistently for the reform of marriage as an institution and the extension of women's rights.

## To the Ladies

Wife and servant are the same,  
But only differ in the name:  
For when that fatal knot is tied,  
Which nothing, nothing can divide:  
When she the word *Obey* has said,  
5 And man by law supreme has made,  
Then all that's kind is laid aside,  
And nothing left but state<sup>o</sup> and pride:  
Fierce as an Eastern prince<sup>1</sup> he grows,  
And all his innate rigor shows:  
10 Then but to look, to laugh, or speak,  
Will the nuptial contract break.  
Like mutes, she signs alone must make,  
And never any freedom take:  
But still be governed by a nod,  
15 And fear her husband as her God:  
Him still must serve, him still obey,  
And nothing act, and nothing say,  
But what her haughty lord thinks fit,  
Who with the power, has all the wit.<sup>o</sup>  
20 Then shun, oh! shun that wretched state,  
And all the fawning flatterers hate:  
Value your selves, and men despise,  
You must be proud, if you'll be wise.

## Endnotes

1703

- Note 1: In the 18th century, Britons who prided themselves on their limited monarchy and representative institutions often

emphasized the absolute, arbitrary power of monarchies in Asia.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *lordly dignity*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *intellectual authority*[Return to reference °](#)

## ANONYMOUS

This anonymous poem rejects heterosexual love and celebrates love between women. Scholars have been fascinated by its forthright stance, though the extreme nature of its rejection of heterosexuality has led some to view its original purpose as ironic and satirical. It is not easy to determine how a diversity of eighteenth-century readers might have responded to its clear, confident declaration. The poem appeared in print once in the eighteenth century, in *A New Miscellany of Original Poems, Translations, and Imitations, by the Most Eminent Hands* (1720), assembled by Anthony Hammond.

## Cloe to Artimesa

While vulgar<sup>o</sup> souls their vulgar love pursue,  
And in the common way themselves undo;  
Impairing health, and fame, and risking life.  
To be a mistress, or what's worse, a wife,  
5 We, whom a nicer<sup>o</sup> taste has raised above  
The dangerous follies of such slavish love;  
Despise the sex,<sup>o</sup> and in ourselves we find,  
Pleasures for their gross<sup>o</sup> senses too refined.  
Let brutish men, made by our weakness vain,  
10 Boast of the easy conquest they obtain.  
Let the poor loving wretch do all she can,  
And all won't please th'ungrateful tyrant, man;  
We scorn the monster and his mistress too,  
And show the world what women ought to do.

### Notes

1720

- <sup>o</sup>: *common, customary*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *more discriminating*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *men*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>
- <sup>o</sup>: *coarse, dull*[Return to reference](#) <sup>o</sup>



## MARY MASTERS

Mary Masters (ca. 1694–1759) published two volumes, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1733) and *Familiar Letters and Poems on Several Occasions* (1755), though according to an autobiographical note in her first book, her family was poor, her education limited, and “her genius to poetry was always brow-beat and discountenanced by her parents.” Few details are known about her career, but her books included lists of subscribers with many names of women and men famous in the literary world of her times. Her work was anthologized in important collections of work by the foremost women poets of the century, *Poems by Eminent Ladies* (1755) and *Poems by the Most Eminent Ladies of Great-Britain and Ireland* (1773). She often commented in her poems and published letters on the injustice of the institution of marriage to women, and never herself married. Many of her poems, like the one below, treat her intensely passionate relationships with her female friends.

# To the Same, Enquiring Why I Wept<sup>1</sup>

You fix a dagger in my heart,  
You wound me in the tenderest part,  
And then enquire the reason of my smart.<sup>°</sup>

5 Alas! You talk of death and woe  
That you must quickly undergo;  
Yet ask the cause whence all my sorrows flow.

Ah! Do you think my love so small,  
That I could part with thee, my all,  
Yet not permit one friendly tear to fall?

10 Tell me, my dear Olinda, why  
You question my fidelity,  
Methinks with thee that I could e'en wish to die.

## Endnotes

1733

- Note 1: In a preceding poem, Masters addresses "Olinda"—like other poets, she frequently uses pastoral pseudonyms for her friends—who has contracted a fever which, as the speaker fears, could cause her death.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *sharp pain*[Return to reference °](#)

## JONATHAN SWIFT

"The Lady's Dressing Room" is the first in a series of "excremental" poems in which Swift (see [p. 362](#)) punctures idealizations of women and their beauty. If one object of satire is the grossness of Celia, "the goddess," the romantic illusions of Strephon, her disabused lover, are far more absurd.

# The Lady's Dressing Room

Five hours (and who can do it less in?)  
By haughty Celia spent in dressing,  
The goddess from her chamber issues,  
Arrayed in lace, brocade, and tissues.  
5 Strephon, who found the room was void,  
And Betty otherwise employed,  
Stole in, and took a strict survey  
Of all the litter as it lay;  
Whereof, to make the matter clear,  
An inventory follows here.  
10 And first a dirty smock appeared,  
Beneath the armpits well besmeared.  
Strephon, the rogue, displayed it wide,  
And turned it round on every side.  
In such a case few words are best,  
15 And Strephon bids us guess the rest;  
But swears how damnably the men lie,  
In calling Celia sweet and cleanly.  
Now listen while he next produces  
The various combs for various uses,  
20 Filled up with dirt so closely fixed,  
No brush could force a way betwixt;  
A paste of composition rare,  
Sweat, dandruff, powder, lead, and hair;  
A forehead cloth with oil upon't  
25 To smooth the wrinkles on her front;  
Here alum flower<sup>o</sup> to stop the steams  
Exhaled from sour unsavory streams;  
There night-gloves made of Tripsy's hide,  
Bequeathed by Tripsy when she died,  
30 With puppy water,<sup>1</sup> beauty's help,

Distilled from Tripsy's darling whelp;  
Here gallipots<sup>o</sup> and vials placed,  
Some filled with washes, some with paste,  
Some with pomatum,<sup>o</sup> paints, and slops,  
35 And ointments good for scabby chops.  
Hard by a filthy basin stands,  
Fouled with the scouring of her hands;  
The basin takes whatever comes,  
The scraping of her teeth and gums,  
40 A nasty compound of all hues,  
For here she spits, and here she spews.  
But oh! it turned poor Strephon's bowels,  
When he beheld and smelt the towels,  
Begummed, bemattered, and beslimed,  
45 With dirt, and sweat, and earwax grimed.  
No object Strephon's eye escapes;  
Here petticoats in frowzy heaps,  
Nor be the handkerchiefs forgot,  
All varnished o'er with snuff and snot.  
50 The stockings why should I expose,  
Stained with the marks of stinking toes,  
Or greasy coifs and pinner<sup>o</sup>s reeking,  
Which Celia slept at least a week in?  
A pair of tweezers next he found  
55 To pluck her brows in arches round,  
Or hairs that sink the forehead low,  
Or on her chin like bristles grow.  
The virtues we must not let pass  
Of Celia's magnifying glass.  
60 When frightened Strephon cast his eye on't,  
It showed the visage of a giant—  
A glass that can to sight disclose  
The smallest worm in Celia's nose,  
And faithfully direct her nail  
65 To squeeze it out from head to tail;  
For catch it nicely by the head,

It must come out alive or dead.

70       Why Strephon will you tell the rest?  
And must you needs describe the chest?  
That careless wench! no creature warn her  
To move it out from yonder corner,  
But leave it standing full in sight,  
For you to exercise your spite.  
75       In vain the workman showed his wit  
With rings and hinges counterfeit  
To make it seem in this disguise  
A cabinet to vulgar eyes;  
For Strephon ventured to look in,  
Resolved to go through thick and thin;  
80       He lifts the lid, there needs no more,  
He smelt it all the time before.

      As from within Pandora's box,  
When Epimetheus oped the locks,  
A sudden universal crew  
85       Of human evils upward flew,  
He still was comforted to find  
That Hope at last remained behind;<sup>2</sup>  
So Strephon, lifting up the lid  
To view what in the chest was hid,  
90       The vapors flew from out the vent,  
But Strephon cautious never meant  
The bottom of the pan to grope,  
And foul his hands in search of Hope.  
Oh never may such vile machine  
95       Be once in Celia's chamber seen!  
Oh may she better learn to keep  
"Those secrets of the hoary deep!"<sup>3</sup>

      As mutton cutlets, prime of meat,  
Which though with art you salt and beat,  
100       As laws of cookery require,  
And roast them at the clearest fire,

If from adown the hopeful chops  
The fat upon a cinder drops,  
To stinking smoke it turns the flame,  
105 Poisoning the flesh from whence it came,  
And thence exhales a greasy stench,  
For which you curse the careless wench;  
So things which must not be expressed,  
When plumped into the reeking chest,  
110 Send up an excremental smell  
To taint the parts from which they fell,  
The petticoats and gown perfume,  
And waft a stink round every room.  
Thus finishing his grand survey,  
115 The swain disgusted slunk away,  
Repeating in his amorous fits,  
"Oh! Celia, Celia, Celia shits!"  
But Vengeance, goddess never sleeping,  
Soon punished Strephon for his peeping.  
120 His foul imagination links  
Each dame he sees with all her stinks,  
And, if unsavory odors fly,  
Conceives a lady standing by.  
All women his description fits,  
125 And both ideas jump like wits,<sup>4</sup>  
By vicious fancy coupled fast,  
And still appearing in contrast.  
I pity wretched Strephon, blind  
To all the charms of womankind.  
130 Should I the queen of love refuse  
Because she rose from stinking ooze?<sup>5</sup>  
To him that looks behind the scene,  
Statira's but some pocky quean.<sup>6</sup>  
When Celia in her glory shows,  
135 If Strephon would but stop his nose,  
Who now so impiously blasphemes

140

Her ointments, daubs, and paints, and creams,  
Her washes, slops, and every clout<sup>o</sup>  
With which she makes so foul a rout,  
He soon would learn to think like me,  
And bless his ravished eyes to see  
Such order from confusion sprung,  
Such gaudy tulips raised from dung.

## Endnotes

1732

- Note 1: A cosmetic made from the internal organs of a puppy (here from the whelp of Celia's former lapdog).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Despite the warnings of his brother Prometheus, Epimetheus married Pandora, the first woman (according to Greek mythology). When the box that Zeus had given her was opened, all evils flew out into the world, and only hope remained.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: *Paradise Lost* 2.891.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Coincide; after the proverb "Good wits jump" (that is, great minds think alike).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The goddess Venus rose out of the sea.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Strumpet, with a pun on Nathaniel Lee's *Rival Queens* (1677), a play in which Statira was a heroine.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *styptic powder*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *small pots*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *pomade*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *nightcaps*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *rag*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)



## LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU

Montagu (see [p. 633](#)) did not like Swift. She objected to his politics (he worked for Tories, she was a Whig), his friendship with Pope (with whom she had bitterly quarreled), his vanity (especially about knowing important people), and his defiant indecency (which she considered not only inappropriate for a clergyman but also a sign of low breeding). Her reply to "The Lady's Dressing Room" mimics its style, but substitutes vulgar names for its mock-pastoral ones (Betty instead of Celia) and mingles personal contempt with a diagnosis of Swift's anti-idealism, which stems, she suggests, from his own insecurities. The poem was originally published anonymously in 1734 under the title "The Dean's Provocation for Writing the Lady's Dressing Room"; the version reprinted here is from a fair copy in Montagu's hand.

# The Reasons That Induced Dr. Swift to Write a Poem Called The Lady's Dressing Room

The Doctor in a clean starched band,<sup>o</sup>  
His golden snuff box in his hand,  
With care his diamond ring displays  
And artful shows its various rays,  
While grave he stalks down —— Street,  
5 His dearest Betty —— to meet.  
    Long had he waited for this hour,  
Nor gained admittance to the bower,  
Had joked and punned, and swore and writ,  
Tried all his gallantry and wit,  
10 Had told her oft what part he bore  
In Oxford's<sup>1</sup> schemes in days of yore,  
But bawdy, politics, nor satyr<sup>2</sup>  
Could move this dull hard-hearted creature.  
Jenny her maid could taste a rhyme  
15 And grieved to see him lose his time,  
Had kindly whispered in his ear,  
"For twice two pound you enter here;  
My lady vows without that sum  
It is in vain you write or come."  
20     The destined offering now he brought  
And in a paradise of thought  
With a low bow approached the dame  
Who smiling heard him preach his flame.  
His gold she takes (such proofs as these  
25 Convince most unbelieving shes)  
And in her trunk rose up to lock it  
(Too wise to trust it in her pocket)

And then, returned with blushing grace,  
Expects the Doctor's warm embrace.  
30 But now this is the proper place  
Where morals stare me in the face  
And for the sake of fine expression  
I'm forced to make a small digression.  
Alas for wretched humankind,  
35 With learning mad, with wisdom blind!  
The ox thinks he's for saddle fit  
(As long ago friend Horace writ)<sup>3</sup>  
And men their talents still mistaking,  
The stutterer fancies his is speaking.  
40 With admiration oft we see  
Hard features heightened by toupée,  
The beau affects<sup>o</sup> the politician,  
Wit is the citizen's<sup>4</sup> ambition,  
Poor Pope philosophy displays on  
45 With so much rhyme and little reason,  
And though he argues ne'er so long  
That all is right, his head is wrong.<sup>5</sup>  
None strive to know their proper merit  
But strain for wisdom, beauty, spirit,  
50 And lose the praise that is their due  
While they've the impossible in view.  
So have I seen the injudicious heir  
To add one window the whole house impair.  
Instinct the hound does better teach  
55 Who never undertook to preach;  
The frightened hare from dogs does run  
But not attempts to bear a gun.  
Here many noble thoughts occur  
But I prolixity abhor,  
60 And will pursue the instructive tale  
To show the wise in some things fail.  
The reverend lover with surprise

65      Peeps in her bubbies, and her eyes,      }  
          And kisses both, and tries—and tries.      }  
          The evening in this hellish play,  
          Beside his guineas thrown away,  
          Provoked the priest to that degree  
          He swore, "The fault is not in me.  
 70      Your damned close stool so near my nose,  
          Your dirty smock, and stinking toes,  
          Would make a Hercules as tame  
          As any beau that you can name."  
          The nymph grown furious roared, "By God!  
 75      The blame lies all in sixty odd,"  
          And scornful pointing to the door  
          Cried, "Fumbler, see my face no more."  
          "With all my heart I'll go away,  
          But nothing done, I'll nothing pay.  
          Give back the money."—"How," cried she,  
 80      "Would you palm such a cheat on me!  
          For poor four pound to roar and bellow,  
          Why sure you want some new Prunella?"<sup>6</sup>  
          "I'll be revenged, you saucy quean"<sup>o</sup>  
          (Replies the disappointed Dean),  
 85      "I'll so describe your dressing room  
          The very Irish shall not come."<sup>z</sup>  
          She answered short, "I'm glad you'll write,  
          You'll furnish paper when I shite."

## Endnotes

1734

- Note 1: Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, headed the government from 1710 to 1714. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Satire (pronounced *say'tir*). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: *Epistles* 1.14.43. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "A townsman; a man of trade; not a gentleman" (Johnson's *Dictionary*). [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: A parody of Pope's *An Essay on Man* 1.292, which had just been published.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A name for a sex worker and a worsted cloth worn by clergymen.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A gibe at the supposed crassness of Irishmen (like Swift himself).[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *clerical collar*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *poses as*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *strumpet*[Return to reference °](#)

## HENRY FIELDING

On October 7, 1746, Charles Hamilton was tried in the court of the Quarter Sessions in the English town of Taunton after his wife, Mary Price, reported that, to her surprise, he was not a man. The court found that Hamilton was female and had put on “man’s apparel”—breeches, a periwig, and ruffles—to deceive Price, and the world. It was not easy for the court to determine the right charge to bring against Hamilton. Sex between women, though considered outrageous, was not expressly illegal (unlike sex between men, which was punishable by execution under Britain’s sodomy laws); and while the prosecution alleged that Hamilton had married a total of fourteen women, he could not be called a polygamist because there was no such thing, in the court’s eyes, as marriage between two people of the same sex. Hamilton was prosecuted under the Vagrancy Act of 1744, which gave courts wide latitude to punish people who it deemed were not who they claimed to be. According to Hamilton’s deposition, he was born a daughter to Mary and William Hamilton in Somerset and named Mary, and lived his early years in Scotland. He began wearing his brother’s clothes and publicly identifying as male at age fourteen, and eventually served as apprentice to two “mountebanks,” unlicensed medical practitioners who traveled the countryside dispensing cures. Practicing as a mountebank himself, he met and married Mary Price in the English city of Wells, and they traveled together for two months before Price discovered what she would later swear in court to be her husband’s “true sex.” The court found, in its words, that “the he or she prisoner at the bar is an uncommon, notorious cheat,” and ordered Hamilton to be imprisoned for six months and severely whipped in four different nearby market towns. After that, there is no further record of him, but the figure of “the female husband” which he introduced to English law and culture was used to

categorize numerous nonheteronormative, gender-nonconforming people well into the nineteenth century.

The short pamphlet *The Female Husband* (1746) was produced by the eminent eighteenth-century novelist Henry Fielding (1707–1754) soon after the case of Hamilton was tried. Fielding never interviewed Charles Hamilton, as he claims to have done on the title page, likely taking most of what truth there is in his story from newspaper accounts. The vast majority of Fielding's narrative is pure fiction, starting with the name "George Hamilton" that he gives to the story's protagonist. But *The Female Husband* was written to capitalize on a sensational news story, and thus indicates how news media in the eighteenth century, themselves often trafficking in reckless speculation and outright fabrications, provided a profitable model for English fiction. Fielding's text can be classified as a "criminal biography," an example of which he had already published in *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743), a satirical narrative about a notorious London gangster.

The castigation and legally inflicted violence that Charles Hamilton faced in reality, and that George Hamilton undergoes in Fielding's fiction, demonstrate how threatening the eighteenth-century English public could find figures who did not conform to ordinary understandings of gender. Such figures provoked intense cultural anxiety by challenging the idea that gender was biologically determined and clear, and that sexual desire must always follow a path toward the "opposite" gender. Fielding's story begins and ends with heavy moralizing against what he calls the "monstrous" course of life taken by his protagonist. But as the story unfolds, he cannot resist depicting a social world almost entirely suffused with deviations from "the normal," adjacent and connected to the main one. These include the passions unleashed by a new religious movement, Methodism; the irregular practice of medicine by quack doctors; and various sexual curiosities that run from the fantastical naiveté of virgins to the desires of old widows for young, "effeminate" men. Finally the neighbors' cruel enforcement of social and gender norms itself is offered as an example of moral

transgression. Fielding comes to treat George Hamilton with wry fondness, calling him “our adventurer” in a way that recalls his attitude toward his other fictional heroes. While the text varies the pronouns it assigns to Hamilton, perhaps to mock his use of male ones, such variations seem inadvertently to confirm the fluidity of gender that Fielding sets out to reject. Published between his two most famous novels—*The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749)—Fielding’s *The Female Husband* presents its protagonist as a queer reflection of the wandering hero who gives life to his innovations in English fiction.



# The Female Husband<sup>1</sup>

That propense<sup>2</sup> inclination which is for very wise purposes implanted in the one sex for the other, is not only necessary for the continuance of the human species; but is, at the same time, when governed and directed by virtue and religion, productive not only of corporeal delight, but of the most rational felicity.

But if once our carnal appetites are let loose, without those prudent and secure guides, there is no excess and disorder which they are not liable to commit, even while they pursue their natural satisfaction; and, which may seem still more strange, there is nothing monstrous and unnatural which they are not capable of inventing, nothing so brutal and shocking which they have not actually committed.

Of these unnatural lusts, all ages and countries have afforded us too many instances; but none I think more surprising than what will be found in the history of Mrs. Mary, otherwise Mr. George Hamilton.

This heroine in iniquity was born in Isle of Man, on the 16th day of August, 1721. Her father was formerly a serjeant of grenadiers in the Foot Guards,<sup>3</sup> who having the good fortune to marry a widow of some estate in that island, purchased his discharge from the army, and retired thither with his wife.

He had not been long arrived there before he died, and left his wife with child of this Mary; but her mother, though she had not two months to reckon, could not stay<sup>4</sup> till she was delivered, before she took a third husband.

As her mother, though she had three husbands, never had any other child, she always expressed an extraordinary affection for this daughter, to whom she gave as good an education as the island afforded; and though she used her with much tenderness, yet was the girl brought up in the strictest principles of virtue and religion; nor did she in her younger years discover<sup>5</sup> the least proneness to

any kind of vice, much less give cause of suspicion that she would one day disgrace her sex by the most abominable and unnatural pollutions. And indeed she hath often declared from her conscience, that no irregular passion ever had any place in her mind, till she was first seduced by one Anne Johnson, a neighbor of hers, with whom she had been acquainted from her childhood; but not with such intimacy as afterwards grew between them.

This Anne Johnson going on some business to Bristol, which detained her there near half a year, became acquainted with some of the people called Methodists,<sup>6</sup> and was by them persuaded to embrace their sect.

At her return to the Isle of Man, she soon made an easy convert of Molly Hamilton, the warmth of whose disposition rendered her susceptible enough of enthusiasm,<sup>7</sup> and ready to receive all those impressions which her friend the Methodist endeavored to make on her mind.

These two young women became now inseparable companions, and at length bedfellows: for Molly Hamilton was prevailed on to leave her mother's house, and to reside entirely with Mrs. Johnson,<sup>8</sup> whose fortune was not thought inconsiderable in that cheap country.

Young Mrs. Hamilton began to conceive a very great affection for her friend, which perhaps was not returned with equal faith by the other. However Mrs. Hamilton declares her love, or rather friendship, was totally innocent, till the temptations of Johnson first led her astray. This latter was, it seems, no novice in impurity, which, as she confessed, she had learnt and often practiced at Bristol with her methodistical sisters.

As Molly Hamilton was extremely warm in her inclinations, and as those inclinations were so violently attached to Mrs. Johnson, it would not have been difficult for a less artful<sup>9</sup> woman, in the most private hours, to turn the ardor of enthusiastic devotion into a different kind of flame.

Their conversation, therefore, soon became in the highest manner criminal, and transactions not fit to be mentioned past between them.

They had not long carried on this wicked crime before Mrs. Johnson was again called by her affairs to visit Bristol, and her friend was prevailed on to accompany her thither.

Here when they arrived, they took up their lodgings together, and lived in the same detestable manner as before; till an end was put to their vile amours, by the means of one Rogers, a young fellow, who by his extraordinary devotion (for he was a very zealous Methodist) or by some other charms (for he was very jolly and handsome) gained the heart of Mrs. Johnson, and married her.

This amour, which was not of any long continuance before it was brought to a conclusion, was kept an entire secret from Mrs. Hamilton; but she was no sooner informed of it, than she became almost frantic, she tore her hair, beat her breasts, and behaved in as outrageous a manner as the fondest husband could, who had unexpectedly discovered the infidelity of a beloved wife.

In the midst of these agonies she received a letter from Mrs. Johnson, in the following words, or as near them as she can possibly remember:

“Dear Molly,

I know you will condemn what I have now done; but I condemn myself much more for what I have done formerly: for I take the whole shame and guilt of what hath passed between us on myself. I was indeed the first seducer of your innocence, for which I ask God’s pardon and yours. All the amends I can make you is earnestly to beseech you, in the name of the Lord, to forsake all such evil courses, and to follow my example now, as you before did my temptation, and enter as soon as you can into that holy state into which I was yesterday called. In which, though I am yet but a novice, believe me, there are delights infinitely surpassing the faint endearments we have experienced together. I shall always pray for you, and continue your friend.”

This letter rather increased than abated her rage, and she resolved to go immediately and upbraid her false friend; but while she was taking this resolution, she was informed that Mr. Rogers and his bride were departed from Bristol by a messenger, who brought her a second short note, and a bill for some money from Mrs. Rogers.

As soon as the first violence of her passion subsided, she began to consult what course to take, when the strangest thought imaginable suggested itself to her fancy. This was to dress herself in men's clothes, to embark for Ireland, and commence<sup>1</sup> Methodist teacher.

Nothing remarkable happened to her during the rest of her stay in Bristol, which adverse winds occasioned to be a whole week, after she had provided herself with her dress; but at last having procured a passage, and the wind becoming favorable, she set sail for Dublin.

As she was a very pretty woman, she now appeared a most beautiful youth.<sup>2</sup> A circumstance which had its consequences aboard the ship, and had like to have discovered her, in the very beginning of her adventures.

There happened to be in the same vessel with this adventurer a Methodist, who was bound to the same place, on the same design<sup>3</sup> with herself.

The two being alone in the cabin together, and both at their devotions, the man in the ecstasy of his enthusiasm, thrust one of his hands into the other's bosom. Upon which, in her surprise, she gave so effeminate a squall, that it reached the captain's ears, as he was smoking his pipe upon deck. "Hey day," says he, "what, have we a woman in the ship!" and immediately descended into the cabin, where he found the two Methodists on their knees.

"Pox on't," says the captain, "I thought you had a woman with you here; I could have sworn I had heard one cry out as if she had been ravishing,<sup>4</sup> and yet the devil must have been in you, if you could convey her in here without my knowledge."

"I defy the devil and all his works," answered the he-Methodist. "He has no power but over the wicked; and if he be in the ship, thy oaths<sup>5</sup> must have brought him hither: for I have heard thee pronounce more than twenty since I came on board; and we should have been at the bottom before this, had not my prayers prevented it."

"Don't abuse my vessel," cried the captain, "she is as safe a vessel, and as good a sailer as ever floated, and if you had been afraid of going to the bottom, you might have stayed on shore and been damned."

The Methodist made no answer, but fell a groaning, and that so loud, that the Captain giving him a hearty curse or two, quitted the cabin, and resumed his pipe.

He was no sooner gone, than the Methodist gave farther tokens of brotherly love to his companion, which soon became so importunate and troublesome to her, that after having gently rejected his hands several times, she at last recollected the sex she had assumed, and gave him so violent a blow in the nostrils, that the blood issued from them with great impetuosity.

Whether fighting be opposite to the tenets of his sect (for I have not the honor to be deeply read in their doctrines) or from what other motive it proceeded, I will not determine; but the Methodist made no other return to this rough treatment, than by many groans, and prayed heartily to be delivered soon from the conversation of the wicked; which prayers were at length so successful, that, together with a very brisk gale, they brought the vessel into Dublin harbor.

Here our adventurer took a lodging in a backstreet near St. Stephen's Green,<sup>6</sup> at which place she intended to preach the next day; but had got a cold in the voyage, which occasioned such a hoarseness that made it impossible to put that design in practice.

There lodged in the same house with her, a brisk<sup>7</sup> widow of near 40 years of age, who had buried two husbands, and seemed by her behavior to be far from having determined against a third expedition to the land of matrimony.

To this widow our adventurer began presently to make addresses, and as he at present wanted<sup>8</sup> tongue to express the ardency of his flame, he was obliged to make use of actions of endearment such as squeezing, kissing, toying, &c.

These were received in such a manner by the fair widow, that her lover thought he had sufficient encouragement to proceed to a formal declaration of his passion. And this she chose to do by letter, as her voice still continued too hoarse for uttering the soft accents of love.

A letter therefore was penned accordingly in the usual style, which, to prevent any miscarriages, Mrs. Hamilton thought proper to deliver with her own hands; and immediately retired to give the adored lady an opportunity of digesting the contents alone, little doubting of an answer agreeable to her wishes, or at least such a one as the coyness of the sex generally dictates in the beginning of an amour, and which lovers, by long experience, know pretty well how to interpret.

But what was the gallant's surprise, when in return to an amorous epistle, she read the following sarcasms, which it was impossible for the most sanguine temper to misunderstand, or construe favorably.

"Sir,

I was greatly astonished at what you put into my hands. Indeed I thought, when I took it, it might have been an opera song, and which for certain reasons I should think, when your cold is gone, you might sing as well as Farinelli,<sup>9</sup> from the great resemblance there is between your persons. I know not what you mean by encouragement to your hopes; if I could have conceived my innocent freedoms could have been so misrepresented, I should have been more upon my guard: but you have taught me how to watch my actions for the future, and to preserve myself even from any suspicion of forfeiting the regard I owe to the memory of the best of

men, by any future choice. The remembrance of that dear person makes me incapable of proceeding farther.—”

And so firm was this resolution, that she would never afterwards admit of the least familiarity with the despairing Mrs. Hamilton; but perhaps that destiny which is remarked to interpose in all matrimonial things, had taken the widow into her protection: for in a few days afterwards, she was married to one Jack Strong, a cadet in an Irish regiment.

Our adventurer being thus disappointed in her love, and what is worse, her money drawing towards an end, began to have some thoughts of returning home, when fortune seemed inclined to make her amends for the tricks she had hitherto played her, and accordingly now threw another mistress in her way, whose fortune was much superior to the former widow, and who received Mrs. Hamilton’s addresses with all the complaisance she could wish.

This lady, whose name was Rushford, was the widow of a rich cheese-monger, who left her all he had, and only one great grandchild to take care of, whom, at her death, he recommended to be her heir; but wholly at her own power and discretion.

She was now in the sixty-eighth year of her age, and had not, it seems, entirely abandoned all thoughts of the pleasures of this world: for she was no sooner acquainted with Mrs. Hamilton, but, taking her for a beautiful lad of about eighteen, she cast the eyes of affection on her, and having pretty well outlived the bashfulness of her youth, made little scruple of giving hints of her passion of her own accord.

It has been observed that women know more of one another than the wisest men (if ever such have been employed in the study) have with all their art been capable of discovering. It is therefore no wonder that these hints were quickly perceived and understood by the female gallant, who animadverting on the conveniency which the old gentlewoman’s fortune would produce in her present situation, very gladly embraced the opportunity, and advancing with great warmth of love to the attack, in which she was received almost with

open arms, by the tottering citadel, which presently offered to throw open the gates, and surrender at discretion.<sup>1</sup>

In her amour with the former widow, Mrs. Hamilton had never any other design than of gaining the lady's affection, and then discovering herself to her, hoping to have had the same success which Mrs. Johnson had found with her: but with this old lady, whose fortune only she was desirous to possess, such views would have afforded very little gratification. After some reflection, therefore, a device entered into her head, as strange and surprising as it was wicked and vile; and this was actually to marry the old woman, and to deceive her, by means which decency forbids me even to mention.

The wedding was accordingly celebrated in the most public manner, and with all kind of gaiety, the old woman greatly triumphing in her shame, and instead of hiding her own head for fear of infamy, was actually proud of the beauty of her new husband, for whose sake she intended to disinherit her poor great-grandson, though she had derived her riches from her husband's family, who had always intended this boy as his heir. Nay, what may seem very remarkable, she insisted on the parson's not omitting the prayer in the matrimonial service for fruitfulness;<sup>2</sup> drest herself as airy as a girl of eighteen, concealed twenty years of her age, and laughed and promoted all the jokes which are usual at weddings; but she was not so well pleased with a repartee of her great-grandson, a pretty and a smart lad, who, when somebody jested on the bridegroom because he had no beard, answered smartly: "There should never be a beard on both sides": for indeed the old lady's chin was pretty well stocked with bristles.

Nor was this bride contented with displaying her shame by a public wedding dinner, she would have the whole ceremony completed, and the stocking was accordingly thrown<sup>3</sup> with the usual sport and merriment.

During the first three days of the marriage, the bride expressed herself so well satisfied with her choice, that being in company with another old lady, she exulted so much in her happiness, that her



friend began to envy her, and could not forbear inveighing against effeminacy in men; upon which a discourse arose between the two old ladies, not proper to be repeated, if I knew every particular; but ended at the last, in the unmarried lady's declaring to the bride, that she thought her husband looked more like a woman than a man. To which the other replied in triumph, he was the best man in Ireland.

This and the rest which past was faithfully recounted to Mrs. Hamilton by her wife at their next meeting, and occasioned our young bridegroom to blush, which the old lady perceiving and regarding as an effect of youth, fell upon her in a rage of love like a tigress, and almost murdered her with kisses.

One of our English poets remarks in the case of a more able husband than Mrs. Hamilton was, when his wife grew amorous in an unseasonable time:

The doctor understood the call,  
But had not always wherewithal.<sup>4</sup>

So it happened to our poor bridegroom, who having not at that time *the wherewithal* about her, was obliged to remain merely passive, under all this torrent of kindness of his wife; but this did not discourage her, who was an experienced woman, and thought she had a cure for this coldness in her husband, the efficacy of which she might perhaps have essayed formerly. Saying therefore with a tender smile to her husband, "I believe you are a woman," her hands began to move in such direction, that the discovery would absolutely have been made, had not the arrival of dinner, at that very instant, prevented it.

However, as there is but one way of laying the spirit of curiosity, when once raised in a woman, *viz.* by satisfying it, so that discovery, though delayed, could not now be long prevented. And accordingly the very next night, the husband and wife had not been long in bed together, before a storm arose, as if drums, guns, wind and thunder were all roaring together. *Villain, rogue, whore, beast, cheat* all resounded at the same instant, and were followed by curses,

imprecations and threats, which soon waked the poor great-grandson in the garret; who immediately ran downstairs into his great-grandmother's room. He found her in the midst of it in her shift, with a handful of shirt in one hand, and a handful of hair in the other, stamping and crying, "I am undone, cheated, abused, ruined, robbed by a vile jade, imposter, whore.—" "What is the matter, dear madam," answered the youth; "O child," replied she, "undone! I am married to one who is no man. My husband? a woman, a woman, a woman." "Ay," said the grandson, "where is she?"—"Run away, gone," said the great-grandmother, and indeed so she was: for no sooner was the fatal discovery made than the poor female bridegroom whipt on her breeches, in the pockets of which she had stowed all the money she could, and slipping on her shoes, with her coat, waistcoat and stockings in her hands, had made the best of her way into the street, leaving almost one half of her shirt behind, which the enraged wife had tore from her back.

As Mrs. Hamilton well knew that an adventure of that kind would soon fill all Dublin, and that it was impossible for her to remain there undiscovered, she hastened away to the Key, where by good fortune, she met with a ship just bound to Dartmouth,<sup>5</sup> on board which she immediately went, and sailed out of the harbor, before her pursuers could find out or overtake her.

She was a full fortnight in her passage, during which time, no adventure occurred worthy remembrance. At length she landed at Dartmouth, where she soon provided herself with linen, and thence went to Totness, where she assumed the title of a doctor of physic,<sup>6</sup> and took lodgings in the house of one Mrs. Baytree.

Here she soon became acquainted with a young girl, the daughter of one Mr. Ivythorn, who had the green sickness; a distemper which the doctor gave out he could cure by an infallible nostrum.<sup>7</sup>

The doctor had not been long entrusted with the care of this young patient before he began to make love to her:<sup>8</sup> for though her complexion was somewhat faded with her distemper, she was otherwise extremely pretty.

This girl became an easy conquest to the doctor, and the day of their marriage was appointed, without the knowledge or even suspicion of her father, or of an old aunt who was very fond of her, and would neither of them have easily given their consent to the match, had the doctor been as good a man as the niece thought him.

At the day appointed, the doctor and his mistress found means to escape very early in the morning from Totness, and went to a town called Ashburton<sup>9</sup> in Devonshire, where they were married by a regular license which the doctor had previously obtained.

Here they stayed two days at a public house, during which time the doctor so well acted his part, that his bride had not the least suspicion of the legality of her marriage, or that she had not got a husband for life. The third day they returned to Totness, where they both threw themselves at Mr. Ivythorn's feet, who was highly rejoiced at finding his daughter restored to him, and that she was not debauched, as he had suspected of her. And being a very worthy good-natured man, and regarding the true interest and happiness of his daughter more than the satisfying his own pride, ambition, or obstinacy, he was prevailed on to forgive her, and to receive her and her husband into his house, as his children, notwithstanding the opposition of the old aunt, who declared she would never forgive the wanton slut, and immediately quitted the house, as soon as the young couple were admitted into it.

The doctor and his wife lived together above a fortnight, without the least doubt conceived by the wife, or by any other person, of the doctor's being what he appeared; till one evening the doctor having drank a little too much punch, slept somewhat longer than usual, and when he waked, he found his wife in tears, who asked her husband, amidst many sobs, how he could be so barbarous to have taken such advantage of her ignorance and innocence, and to ruin her in such a manner? The doctor being surprised and scarce awake, asked her what he had done. "Done," says she, "have you not married me a poor young girl, when you know you have not—you have not—what you ought to have. I always thought indeed your

shape was something odd, and have often wondered that you had not the least bit of beard; but I thought you had been a man for all that, or I am sure I would not have been so wicked to marry you for the world." The doctor endeavored to pacify her, by every kind of promise, and telling her she would have all the pleasures of marriage without the inconveniences. "No, no," said she, "you shall not persuade me to that, nor will I be guilty of so much wickedness on any account. I will tell my papa of you as soon as I am up; for you are no husband of mine, nor will I ever have anything more to say to you." Which resolution the doctor finding himself unable to alter, she put on her clothes with all the haste she could, and taking a horse which she had bought a few days before, made the best of her way, through byroads and across the country, into Somersetshire, missing Exeter and every other great town which lay in the road.

And well it was for her, that she used both this haste and precaution: for Mr. Ivythorn having heard his daughter's story, immediately obtained a warrant from a justice of peace, with which he presently dispatched the proper officers; and not only so, but set forward himself to Exeter, in order to try if he could learn any news of his son-in-law, or apprehend her there; till after much search being unable to hear any tidings of her, he was obliged to set down contented with his misfortune, as was his poor daughter to submit to all the ill-natured sneers of her own sex, who were often witty at her expense, and at the expense of their own decency.

The doctor having escaped, arrived safe at Wells<sup>1</sup> in Somersetshire, where thinking herself at a safe distance from her pursuers, she again sat herself down in quest of new adventures.

She had not been long in this city, before she became acquainted with one Mary Price, a girl of about eighteen years of age, and of extraordinary beauty. With this girl, hath this wicked woman since her confinement declared, she was really as much in love as it was possible for a man ever to be with one of her own sex.

The first opportunity our doctor obtained of conversing closely with this new mistress was at a dancing among the inferior sort of

people,<sup>2</sup> in contriving which the doctor had herself the principal share. At the meeting the two lovers had an occasion of dancing all night together; and the doctor lost no opportunity of showing his fondness, as well by his tongue as by his hands, whispering many soft things in her ears, and squeezing as many soft things into her hands, which, together with a good number of kisses, &c. so pleased and warmed this poor girl, who never before had felt any of those tender sensations which we call love, that she retired from the dancing in a flutter of spirits, which her youth and ignorance could not well account for; but which did not suffer her to close her eyes, either that morning or the next night.

The day after that the doctor sent her the following letter.

"My Dearest Molly,  
Excuse the fondness of that expression; for I assure you, my angel, all I write to you proceeds only from my heart, which you have so entirely conquered, and made your own, that nothing else has any share in it; and, my angel, could you know what I feel when I am writing to you, nay even at every thought of my Molly, I know I should gain your pity if not your love; if I am so happy to have already succeeded in raising the former, do let me have once more an opportunity of seeing you, and that soon, that I might breathe forth my soul at those dear feet, where I would willingly die, if I am not suffered to lie there and live. My sweetest creature, give me leave to subscribe myself

Your fond, doting,  
Undone Slave"

This letter added much to the disquietude which before began to torment poor Molly's breast. She read it over twenty times, and, at last, having carefully surveyed every part of the room, that nobody was present, she kissed it eagerly. However, as she was perfectly modest, and afraid of appearing too forward, she resolved not to

answer this first letter; and if she met the doctor, to behave with great coldness to him.

Her mother being ill, prevented her going out that day; and the next morning she received a second letter from the doctor, in terms more warm and endearing than before, and which made so absolute a conquest over the unexperienced and tender heart of this poor girl, that she suffered herself to be prevailed on, by the entreaties of her lover, to write an answer, which nevertheless she determined should be so distant and cool, that the woman of the strictest virtue and modesty in England might have no reason to be ashamed of having writ it; of which letter the reader hath here an exact copy:

"Sur,

I Haf recevd boath your too litters, and sur I ham much surprise hat the loafe you priten to haf for so pur a garl as mee. I kan nut beleef you wul disgrace yourself by marring sutch a yf as mee, and Sur I wool nut be thee hore of the gratest man in the kuntry. For thof mi vartu his all I haf, yit hit is a potion I ham rissolv to kare to mi housband, soe noe moor at presant, from your umble savant to cummand."

The doctor received this letter with all the ecstasies any lover could be inspired with, and as Mr. Congreve says in his *Old Bachelor*, thought there was more eloquence in the false spellings with which it abounded than in all Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> She now resolved to be no longer contented with this distant kind of conversation, but to meet her mistress face to face. Accordingly that very afternoon she went to her mother's house, and enquired for her poor Molly, who no sooner heard her lover's voice than she fell a trembling in the most violent manner. Her sister who opened the door informed the doctor she was at home, and let the imposter in; but Molly being then in dishabille, would not see him till she had put on clean linen, and was arrayed from head to foot in as neat, though not in so fine a manner, as the highest court lady in the kingdom could attire herself in, to receive her embroidered lover.

Very tender and delicate was the interview of this pair, and if any corner of Molly's heart remained untaken, it was now totally subdued. She would willingly have postponed the match somewhat longer, from her strict regard to decency; but the earnestness and ardor of her lover would not suffer her, and she was at last obliged to consent to be married within two days.

Her sister, who was older than herself, and had overheard all that had past, no sooner perceived the doctor gone, than she came to her, and wishing her joy with a sneer, said much good may it do her with such a husband; for that, for her own part, she would almost as willingly be married to one of her own sex, and made some remarks not so proper to be here inserted. This was resented by the other with much warmth. She said she had chosen for herself only, and that if she was pleased, it did not become people to trouble their heads with what was none of their business. She was indeed so extremely enamored, that I question whether she would have exchanged the doctor for the greatest and richest match in the world.

And had not her affections been fixed in this strong manner, it is possible that an accident which happened the very next night might have altered her mind: for being at another dancing with her lover, a quarrel arose between the doctor and a man there present, upon which the mother<sup>4</sup> seizing the former violently by the collar, tore open her waistcoat, and rent her shirt, so that all her breast was discovered, which, though beyond expression beautiful in a woman, were of so different a kind from the bosom of a man, that the married women there set up a great titter; and though it did not bring the doctor's sex into an absolute suspicion, yet caused some whispers, which perhaps might have spoiled the match with a less innocent and less enamored virgin.

It had however no such effect on poor Molly. As her fond heart was free from any deceit, so was it entirely free from suspicion; and accordingly, at the fixed time she met the doctor, and their nuptials were celebrated in the usual form.



The mother was extremely pleased at this preferment<sup>5</sup> (as she thought it) of her daughter. The joy of it did indeed contribute to restore her perfectly to health, and nothing but mirth and happiness appeared in the faces of the whole family.

The new married couple not only continued but greatly increased the fondness which they had conceived for each other, and poor Molly, from some stories she told among her acquaintance, the other young married women of the town, was received as a great fibber, and was at last universally laughed at as such among them all.

Three months past in this manner, when the doctor was sent for to Glastonbury to a patient (for the fame of our adventurer's knowledge in physic began now to spread) when a person of Totness being accidentally present, happened to see and know her, and having heard upon enquiry, that the doctor was married at Wells, as we have above mentioned, related the whole story of Mr. Ivythorn's daughter, and the whole adventure at Totness.

News of this kind seldom wants wings; it reached Wells, and the ears of the doctor's mother<sup>6</sup> before her return from Glastonbury. Upon this the old woman immediately sent for her daughter, and very strictly examined her, telling her the great sin she would be guilty of, if she concealed a fact of this kind, and the great disgrace she would bring on her own family, and even on her whole sex, by living quietly and contentedly with a husband who was in any degree less a man than the rest of his neighbors.

Molly assured her mother of the falsehood of this report; and as it is usual for persons who are too eager in any cause to prove too much, she asserted some things which staggered her mother's belief, and made her cry out, "O child, there is no such thing in human nature."

Such was the progress this story had made in Wells, that before the doctor arrived there, it was in everybody's mouth; and as the doctor rode through the streets, the mob, especially the women, all paid their compliments of congratulation. Some laughed at her, others threw dirt at her, and others used terms of reproach not fit to be commemorated. When she came to her own house, she found



her wife in tears, and having asked her the cause, was informed of the dialogue which had past between her and her mother. Upon which the doctor, though he knew not yet by what means the discovery had been made, yet too well knowing the truth, began to think of using the same method, which she had heard before put in practice, of delivering herself from any impertinence; for as to danger, she was not sufficiently versed in the laws to apprehend any.

In the meantime, the mother, at the solicitation of some of her relations, who, notwithstanding the stout denial of the wife, had given credit to the story, had applied herself to a magistrate, before whom the Totness man appeared, and gave evidence as is before mentioned. Upon this a warrant was granted to apprehend the doctor, with which the constable arrived at her house, just as she was meditating her escape.

The husband was no sooner seized, but the wife threw herself into the greatest agonies of rage and grief, vowing that he was injured, and that the information was false and malicious, and that she was resolved to attend her husband wherever they conveyed him.

And now they all proceeded before the justice, where a strict examination being made into the affair, the whole happened to be true, to the great shock and astonishment of everybody; but more especially of the poor wife, who fell into fits, out of which she was with great difficulty recovered.

The whole truth having been disclosed before the justice, and something of too vile, wicked, and scandalous a nature, which was found in the doctor's trunk, having been produced in evidence against her, she was committed to Bridewell, and Mr. Gold,<sup>7</sup> an eminent and learned counsellor at law, who lives in those parts, was consulted with upon the occasion, who gave his advice that she should be prosecuted at the next sessions, on a clause in the vagrant act, *for having by false and deceitful practice endeavored to impose on some of his Majesty's subjects.*<sup>8</sup>

As the doctor was conveyed to Bridewell, she was attended by many insults from the mob; but what was more unjustifiable was the

cruel treatment which the poor innocent wife received from her own sex, upon the extraordinary accounts which she had formerly given of her husband.

Accordingly at the ensuing sessions of the peace for the county of Somerset, the doctor was indicted for the abovementioned diabolical fact,<sup>9</sup> and after a fair trial convicted, to the entire satisfaction of the whole court.

At the trial the said Mary Price, the wife, was produced as a witness, and being asked by the council, whether she had ever any suspicion of the doctor's sex during the whole time of the courtship, she answered positively in the negative. She was then asked how long they had been married, to which she answered three months; and whether they had cohabited the whole time together? to which her reply was in the affirmative. Then the council asked her, whether during the time of this cohabitation, she imagined the doctor had behaved to her as a husband ought to his wife? Her modesty confounded her a little at this question; but at last answered she did imagine so. Lastly, she was asked when it was that she first harbored any suspicion of her being imposed upon? To which she answered, she had not the least suspicion till her husband was carried before a magistrate, and there discovered, as hath been said above.

The prisoner having been convicted of this base and scandalous crime, was by the court sentenced to be publicly and severely whipt four several times, in four market towns within the county of Somerset, to wit, once in each market town, and to be imprisoned, &c.

These whippings she has accordingly undergone, and very severely have they been inflicted, insomuch, that those persons who have more regard to beauty than to justice, could not refrain from exerting some pity toward her, when they saw so lovely a skin scarified with rods, in such a manner that her back was almost flayed; yet so little effect had the smart or shame of this punishment on the person who underwent it, that the very evening she had suffered the first whipping, she offered the jailer money, to procure

her a young girl to satisfy her most monstrous and unnatural desires.

But it is to be hoped that this example will be sufficient to deter all others from the commission of any such foul and unnatural crimes: for which, if they escape the shame and ruin which they so well deserve in this world, they will be most certain of meeting with their full punishment in the next: for unnatural affections are equally vicious and equally detestable in both sexes, nay, if modesty be the peculiar characteristic of the fair sex, it is in them most shocking and odious to prostitute and debase it.

In order to caution therefore that lovely sex, which, while they preserve their natural innocence and purity, will still look most lovely in the eyes of men, the above pages have been written, which, that they might be worthy of their perusal, such strict regard hath been had to the utmost decency, that notwithstanding the subject of this narrative be of a nature so difficult to be handled inoffensively, not a single word occurs through the whole which might shock the most delicate ear, or give offense to the purest chastity.

## Endnotes

1746

- Note 1: The text's complete title on the title page reads, *The Female Husband, or, The Surprising History of Mrs. Mary, Alias Mr. George Hamilton, who was convicted of having married a Young Woman of Wells and lived with her as her Husband, Taken from her own Mouth since her Confinement.*[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dispositional.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A regiment of infantry in the British Army, commonly responsible for guarding members of the royal family, but with operational, combat duties as well. "Grenadiers": originally soldiers with training to throw grenades, later used to refer to companies of the tallest, finest soldiers in a regiment.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Wait. "To reckon": for her pregnancy to come to term.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Reveal.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Originally a movement within the Church of England founded by John Wesley, Methodism was new in the 1740s when *The Female Husband* was published, and its fervor and openness to members of the laboring classes led orthodox Anglicans to view it as a disruptive force. "Bristol": in this city in the west of England, a site of considerable early Methodist activity, Wesley built the New Room in 1739, the oldest meeting house expressly built for Methodist gatherings and worship in the world.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Religious passion, resulting from divine inspiration.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An abbreviation of "mistress," the title "Mrs." could apply in earlier usage, as here, to an unmarried woman.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cunning.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Begin working as a.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Term conventionally used for a boy on the verge of manhood.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: With the same plan (to teach Methodism).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Was being ravished (sexually assaulted).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Curses.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Large park in the city center of Dublin.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Lively, wanton.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Lacked.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Stage name of Carlo Maria Michelangelo Nicola Broschi (1705–1782), Italian castrato singer, a major figure in the history of opera, who was a sensation in London in the 1730s.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Unconditionally.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The Anglican marriage service in the Book of Common Prayer specifies that a prayer for the couple to “be fruitful in procreation of children” should “be omitted, where the woman is past child-bearing.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the eighteenth century, the wedding game of “flinging the stocking,” thought to be the origin of the custom of throwing garters, predicted the impending marriage of whoever threw a stocking that happened to land on the bride or groom.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From Matthew Prior, “Paulo Purganti and His Wife: An Honest, but a Simple Pair,” in *Poems on Several Occasions* (1708).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Port in southwest England. “Key”: the usual 18th-century spelling for *quay*, an artificial bank where ships are loaded and unloaded, as on Dublin’s River Liffey.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A physician. “Totness”: now Totnes, a town in southwest England about fourteen miles from Dartmouth.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A miracle cure. “Green sickness”: also called chlorosis, thought in early medicine to afflict sexually inexperienced, post-pubescent young women, supposedly characterized by a greenish cast to the skin.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: To romance her.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A little over eight miles from Totnes.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A city over eighty miles northeast of Ashburton, about fifty miles from Exeter.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: People of the laboring classes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Produced in 1683, *The Old Bachelor* was the first play of William Congreve (see p. 220). Bellmour, one of the principal lovers in the comedy, remarks of a letter from a lady, “there’s more elegancy in the false spelling of this superscription than in all Cicero” (not Aristotle).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The text could be faulty here, and perhaps should read “other,” that is, that man with whom Hamilton quarrels.[Return](#)

[to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Social advancement by marriage. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the mother-in-law of George Hamilton. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sir Henry Gould (1710–1794), the prosecuting attorney as indicated in newspaper reports, was Fielding’s cousin.  
“Bridewell”: one of the larger London prisons, which incarcerated both women and men, though the name became a general one for any prison. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: As the charge’s wording here indicates, the Vagrancy Act of 1744 allowed for prosecution of a wide variety of acts of deception and perceived forms of social disorder. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Crime. [Return to reference 9](#)

## MARY LEAPOR

A gardener's daughter, Mary Leapor (1722–1746) spent her short life in or near the small town of Brackley in Northamptonshire. When she was ten or eleven "she would often be scribbling," and poetry turned into a consuming interest. One of her poems describes her sitting "whole evenings, reading wicked plays" by candlelight; according to another, she lost employment as a cook-maid because she would not stop writing, even in the kitchen. Passed around the neighborhood, her verse impressed Bridget Freemantle, the daughter of a former Oxford don; she became Leapor's best friend and mentor. Together they planned to publish Leapor's work. A play was sent to Colley Cibber, the impresario and poet laureate, but it was returned stained by wine. Leapor's health was rarely good, and she died of measles at age twenty-four; she had never seen any of her poems in print. But Freemantle arranged an edition of Leapor's *Poems upon Several Occasions* (1748), with six hundred subscribers, and it was warmly received. Samuel Richardson admired the "sweetly easy poems" so much that he published a second volume; later, William Cowper thought they showed "more marks of a true poetical talent than I remember to have observed in the verses of any, whether male or female, so disadvantageously circumstanced." Recently Leapor's work has attracted renewed attention for its wit and skill as well as its sharp observations about the life of a working-class woman.

The preface to Leapor's *Poems* reports that "the author she most admired was Mr. Pope, whom she chiefly endeavored to imitate." "An Essay on Woman" reflects careful study of Pope's poetry about women and gender, particularly his "Epistle to a Lady." But its view of women's predicaments is very much darker. If women are living contradictions, as Pope had asserted, the reason is that whatever they are and whatever they do can be turned against them. Beauty will be betrayed, wit and learning will be shunned, and the pursuit of

wealth will shrink the soul. Leapor's own situation gives her satire bite. As a gardener's daughter, she knows that the flower of womanhood costs money to cultivate and does not last; as someone witty, poor, in ill health, and excluded from Pope's glamorous world, she sees through romantic myths. In "An Epistle to a Lady" (directly echoing Pope's title), she more autobiographically reflects on education, the main avenue of advancement for women proposed by reformers throughout the period (including Astell, Defoe, Addison, and Johnson). Leapor's experience makes her pessimistic: her learning merely allows her to depict her bleak place in the world on an astronomically expanded scale; and homely, tattered images must intrude on her dreams of the wealth and leisure that she knows a genteel education and a poetic vocation require. But despite Leapor's stress on her frustrating social position and on the softness and weakness of women in general, her verse is strong. This poet never stops fighting against the traps in which she is caught.



## An Essay on Woman

WOMAN—a pleasing but a short-lived flower,  
Too soft for business and too weak for power:  
A wife in bondage, or neglected maid;  
Despised if ugly; if she's fair—betrayed.  
5 'Tis wealth alone inspires every grace,  
And calls the raptures to her plenteous<sup>1</sup> face.  
What numbers for those charming features pine,  
If blooming acres<sup>2</sup> round her temples twine?  
Her lip the strawberry, and her eyes more bright  
Than sparkling Venus in a frosty night;  
10 Pale lilies fade and, when the fair appears,  
Snow turns a negro<sup>3</sup> and dissolves in tears,  
And where the charmer treads her magic toe,  
On English ground Arabian odors grow;  
Till mighty Hymen<sup>4</sup> lifts his sceptred rod,  
15 And sinks her glories with a fatal nod,  
Dissolves her triumphs, sweeps her charms away,  
And turns the goddess to her native clay.  
But, Artemisia,<sup>5</sup> let your servant sing  
What small advantage wealth and beauties bring.  
20 Who would be wise, that knew Pamphilia's fate?  
Or who be fair, and joined to Sylvia's mate?  
Sylvia, whose cheeks are fresh as early day,  
As evening mild, and sweet as spicy May;  
And yet that face her partial husband tires,  
25 And those bright eyes, that all the world admires.  
Pamphilia's wit who does not strive to shun,  
Like death's infection or a dog-day's sun?  
The damsels view her with malignant eyes,  
The men are vexed to find a nymph so wise,  
30

And wisdom only serves to make her know  
The keen sensation of superior woe.  
The secret whisper and the listening ear,  
The scornful eyebrow and the hated sneer,  
The giddy censures of her babbling kind,  
35 With thousand ills that grate a gentle mind,  
By her are tasted in the first degree,  
Though overlooked by Simplicus and me.  
Does thirst of gold a virgin's heart inspire,  
Instilled by nature or a careful sire?  
40 Then let her quit extravagance and play,  
The brisk companion and expensive tea,  
To feast with Cordia in her filthy sty  
On stewed potatoes or on mouldy pie;  
Whose eager<sup>o</sup> eyes stare ghastly at the poor,  
45 And fright the beggars from the hated door;  
In greasy clouts she wraps her smoky chin,  
And holds that pride's a never-pardoned sin.  
If this be wealth, no matter where it falls;  
But save, ye Muses, save your Mira's<sup>6</sup> walls:  
50 Still give me pleasing indolence and ease,  
A fire to warm me and a friend to please.  
Since, whether sunk in avarice or pride,  
A wanton virgin or a starving bride,  
Or wondering crowds attend her charming tongue,  
55 Or deemed an idiot, ever speaks the wrong;  
Though nature armed us for the growing ill  
With fraudulent cunning and a headstrong will,  
Yet, with ten thousand follies to her charge,  
Unhappy woman's but a slave at large.  
60

## Endnotes

1751

- Note 1: Not only blooming but wealthy.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Not only hair but property.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Black, when set against the fair one's skin. The hyperbolic comparisons in this passage are intentionally ironic, as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 130. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The god of marriage. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Bridget Freemantle, given the name of an ancient patron of the arts. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Leapor's pen name. [Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *fierce* [Return to reference °](#)

## An Epistle to a Lady<sup>1</sup>

In vain, dear Madam, yes, in vain you strive,  
Alas! to make your luckless Mira thrive;  
For Tycho and Copernicus<sup>2</sup> agree,  
No golden planet bent its rays on me.<sup>3</sup>

5 'Tis twenty winters, if it is no more,  
To speak the truth it may be twenty four:  
As many springs their 'pointed<sup>o</sup> space have run,  
Since Mira's eyes first opened on the sun.  
'Twas when the flocks on slabby<sup>o</sup> hillocks lie,  
10 And the cold fishes rule the watery sky;<sup>4</sup>  
But though these eyes the learned page explore,  
And turn the ponderous volumes o'er and o'er,  
I find no comfort from their systems flow,<sup>5</sup>  
But am dejected more as more I know.  
15 Hope shines a while, but like a vapor flies  
(The fate of all the curious and the wise)  
For, ah! cold Saturn<sup>6</sup> triumphed on that day,  
And frowning Sol denied his golden ray.

You see I'm learned, and I show't the more,  
20 That none may wonder when they find me poor.  
Yet Mira dreams, as slumbering poets may,  
And rolls in treasures till the breaking day:  
While books and pictures in bright order rise,  
And painted parlors swim before her eyes;  
25 Till the shrill clock impertinently rings,  
And the soft visions move their shining wings;  
Then Mira wakes—her pictures are no more,  
And through her fingers slides the vanished ore.

30 Convinced too soon, her eye unwilling falls  
On the blue curtains and the dusty walls;  
She wakes, alas! to business and to woes,  
To sweep her kitchen, and to mend her clothes.<sup>7</sup>

35 But see pale sickness with her languid eyes,  
At whose appearance all delusion flies:  
The world recedes, its vanities decline,  
Clorinda's features seem as faint as mine;  
Gay robes no more the aching sight admires,  
Wit grates the ear, and melting music tires;  
Its wonted pleasures with each sense decay,  
40 Books please no more, and paintings fade away,  
The sliding joys in misty vapors end;  
Yet let me still, ah! let me grasp a friend;  
And when each joy, when each loved object flies,  
Be you the last that leaves my closing eyes.

45 But how will this dismantled<sup>o</sup> soul appear,  
When stripped of all it lately held so dear,  
Forced from its prison of expiring clay,  
Afraid and shivering at the doubtful way?

50 Yet did these eyes a dying parent<sup>8</sup> see,  
Loosed from all cares except a thought for me,  
Without a tear resign her shortening breath,  
And dauntless meet the lingering stroke of death.  
Then at th'Almighty's sentence shall I mourn:  
"Of dust thou art, to dust shalt thou return";<sup>9</sup>  
Or shall I wish to stretch the line of fate,  
55 That the dull years may bear a longer date,  
To share the follies of succeeding times  
With more vexations and with deeper crimes?  
Ah no—though Heav'n brings near the final day,  
For such a life I will not, dare not pray;  
60 But let the tear for future mercy flow,

65                      And fall resigned beneath the mighty blow.  
                          Nor I alone—for through the spacious ball,<sup>o</sup>  
                          With me will numbers of all ages fall:  
                          And the same day that Mira yields her breath,  
                          Thousands may enter through the gates of death.

## Endnotes

1748

- Note 1: The poem addresses her friend and patron, Bridget Freemantle.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Polish founder of modern astronomy (1473–1543), who thought the Earth circled the sun. Tycho Brahe (1546–1601), Danish astronomer who thought the sun and moon revolved around the stationary Earth.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A “golden planet” would have marked Leapor’s birth as auspicious.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Leapor was born in late winter, under the sign of Pisces (the “fishes”).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, no comfort flows from either the “systems” (bodies of doctrine) contained in books or the systems of stars and planets in the heavens.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The planet Saturn was thought to influence gloomy (hence “saturnine”) temperaments.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Compare with Pope, *Eloisa to Abelard* 223–48.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Leapor’s mother, Anne, died around 1742.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Genesis: 3:19.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Notes

- <sup>o</sup>: *appointed*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *muddy*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *unclothed*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)
- <sup>o</sup>: *Earth*[Return to reference <sup>o</sup>](#)

## HANNAH SNELL AND ROBERT WALKER

Hannah Snell (1723–1792) was not the only person in the eighteenth century celebrated in the British press as a woman who passed as a man to serve in Britain's wars as a soldier, but she became the most famous. Though her father was a hosier, her family in Worcester had a military bent, with several of her brothers becoming, and several of her sisters marrying, soldiers or sailors. Snell herself married a sailor, who then abandoned her. She embarked on her own military career to pursue him, adopting her brother-in-law's name James Gray and serving as a marine, most actively in India, from 1747 to 1750. The year she was discharged, she published *The Female Soldier, or the Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell* with the printer Robert Walker. It is clearly Walker's voice that narrates the story, though the text also insists that the account comes straight from Snell who, as it explains, "could read exceeding well" but could not write. The book made her a celebrity, quickly selling out its first printing and leading to a second in 1750, and launched her brief career in Goodman's Fields Theatre, in which she would sing songs and perform military maneuvers in uniform with a corps of fellow "Amazons" who marched onstage. After demand for her performances waned by 1751, she briefly kept a pub in East London called the Female Warrior, then settled into family life, marrying twice and mothering two children. She remained a figure of cultural memory, her story recounted in Bram Stoker's *Famous Imposters* (1910) and the children's story "Young Amazon Snell" (1913) by Andrew Lang, among other publications through the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.



**Portrait of Hannah Snell**, 1750, engraved by John Faber, after a painting by Richard Phelps.

---

The presentation of Snell's gender identity by Walker and Snell herself is complicated. On one hand, the work's title establishes that identity as female, and her "scene" in the alehouse with her comrades toward the end of the story comes across as a revelation of the truth about herself: "I am as much a woman as my mother



ever was, and my real name is Hannah Snell." On the other, the text signals her non-normative gender identity in numerous respects: when she plays soldier as a child, she takes up a masculine role "naturally," as it were, and the narrator flatly declares later that "she had the real soul of a man in her breast"—though some aspects of male behavior, such as sailors' carousing in Lisbon, cause her "the utmost disgust." Finally, her theatrical stint in Goodman's Fields, publicly performing as a woman performing as a man, threw conventional gender categories into a kind of heady (though briefly lucrative) disarray. Her motivations to be a marine seem to exceed her supposedly primary one, to pursue her husband, as her tale develops. In this, her case resembles other publicly recorded accounts of women who dressed as men to follow their husbands or lovers in the military, such as Mrs. Christian Davies, whose widely read *Life and Adventures* (1740) recounted her bravery serving in King William's and the Duke of Marlborough's wars from 1693 to 1706, and Mary Anne Talbot, who fought in the French Revolutionary Wars. Most striking, perhaps, is how positively the text presents Snell's career and prowess as a marine, and how enthusiastically the public seemed to accept her as a heroine, though details of her story reveal the density and subtlety of the period's codes surrounding gender and sexuality, and which lines could and which could never be crossed.

# ***From The Female Soldier; or, the Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

To the Public:

Notwithstanding the surprising adventures of this our British heroine, of whom the following pages fully and impartially treat; yet the oddity of her conduct for preserving her sex from being discovered, by which she preserved her virtue, was such that it demands not only respect, but admiration; and as there is nothing to be found in the following sheets but what is matter of fact, it merits the countenance and approbation of every inhabitant of this great isle, especially the fair sex, for whom this treatise is chiefly intended; and the truth of which being confirmed by our heroine's affidavit, made before the Right Hon. the Lord Mayor, the said affidavit is hereunto annexed, in order to prevent the public from being imposed upon by fictitious accounts.<sup>[2](#)</sup>

\* \* \*

## **Endnotes**

- Note 1:  
The extended title on the title page reads, "The female soldier; or, the surprising life and adventures of Hannah Snell, Born in the City of Worcester, who took upon herself the name of James Gray; and, being deserted by her husband, put on mens apparel, and travelled to Coventry in quest of him, where she enlisted in Col. Guise's Regiment of Foot, and marched with that Regiment to Carlisle, in the Time of the Rebellion in Scotland; shewing what happened to her in that City, and her Desertion

from that Regiment. Also a full and true account of her enlisting afterwards into Fraser's Regiment of Marines, then at Portsmouth; and her being draughted out of that Regiment, and sent on board the Swallow Sloop of War, one of Admiral Boscawen's Squadron, then bound for the East-Indies. With the many Vicissitudes of Fortune she met with during that Expedition, particularly at the Siege of Pondicherry, where she received Twelve Wounds. Likewise, the surprising Accident by which she came to hear of the Death of her faithless Husband, whom she went in quest of. The Whole Containing The most surprising Incidents that have happened in any preceeding Age; wherein is laid open all her Adventures, in Mens Cloaths, for near five Years, without her Sex being ever discovered."

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Immediately following the preface of *The Female Soldier* came a deposition sworn by Snell before John Blachford (1682–1759), lord mayor of London, asserting Robert Walker's exclusive right to the publication of her story.[Return to reference 2](#)

### [SOLDIERING AS A CHILD; HER MARRIAGE]

There is one thing so very remarkable in the martial disposition of Hannah Snell, even in her juvenile years, the account of which being so facetious,<sup>3</sup> shall recommend it to the perusal of the reader.

Hannah, when she was scarce ten years of age, had the seeds of heroism as it were implanted in her nature, and she used often to declare to her companions, that she would be a soldier if she lived; and as a preceding testimony of this truth, she formed a company of young soldiers among her play-fellows, and of which she was chief commander, at the head of whom she often appeared, and was used to parade the whole city of Worcester. This body of young volunteers were admired all over the town, and they were styled young Amazon<sup>4</sup> Snell's Company: and this martial spirit grew up with her, until it carried her through the many scenes and vicissitudes she encountered for nigh five years, as is fully and impartially related in this treatise of her adventures.

Some time after she came to London,<sup>5</sup> she contracted an acquaintance with one James Summs, a sailor, who was a Dutchman; this acquaintance was gradually improved into a familiarity, and this familiarity soon created a mutual, though not a criminal passion; for in a little time, Summs made his addresses to her as a lover, and gained her consent, and was married to her at the Fleet, on the sixth day of January, 1743–4.<sup>6</sup> But all his promises of friendship proved instances of the highest perfidy, and he turned out the worst and most unnatural of husbands. Since, though she had charms enough to captivate the heart and secure the affection of any reasonable man, yet she was despised and contemned by her husband, who not only kept criminal company with other women of the basest characters, but also made away with her things, in order to support his luxury, and the daily expenses of his whores. During this unlucky period of the husband's debauchery, [t]he poor woman proved with child, and at the same time felt all the shocks of poverty, without exposing her necessities to her nearest friends. But

at last, her pregnancy laid the foundation for her passing through all the scenes through which she has wandered; for when she was seven months gone with child, her perfidious husband finding himself deeply involved in debt, made an elopement from<sup>7</sup> her. Notwithstanding these her calamities, she patiently bore herself up under them, and in two months after her husband's departure was delivered of a daughter which lived no more than seven months, and was decently interred at her own expense at St. George's Parish in Middlesex.

From the time of her husband's elopement till the time she put on man's clothes, she continued with her sister, who is married to one James Gray, a house carpenter, in Ship Street, Wapping, and from whence she took her departure unknown to any, and was never heard of until her return; and with whom she now dwells.

As she was now free from all the ties arising from nature and consanguinity; she thought herself privileged to roam in quest of the man, who, without reason, had injured her so much; for there are no bounds to be set either to love, jealousy or hatred in the female mind. That she might execute her designs with the better grace, and the more success, she boldly commenced a man, at least in her dress, and no doubt she had a right to do so, since she had the real soul of a man in her breast. Dismayed at no accidents, and giving a full scope to the genuine bent of her heart, she put on a suit of her brother-in-law, Mr. James Gray's clothes, assumed his name, and set out on the 23d of November, 1745, and travelled to Coventry, with a view of finding her husband, where she enlisted on the 27th of the said month of November, in General Guise's regiment,<sup>8</sup> and in the company belonging to Captain Miller.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Pleasant, charming. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Referring to the Amazons, a nation of female warriors in Greek mythology.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: After the death of her parents, Snell moved in with her sister and brother-in-law in Wapping, East London.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In the Old Style dating system, which was superseded officially in 1752, the new year began on March 25, not January 1, and during the transition to the new system, authors sometimes provided two successive years (as here) for days that fell between those two dates. “The Fleet”: before the Marriage Act of 1753, which stipulated (among other things) that all marriages had to be solemnized in churches, it was common for those seeking speedy or clandestine weddings, especially the poor or those convicted of crimes, to get married at the Fleet Prison in London, which was seen as outside church jurisdiction.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Abandoned.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: John Guise (1682/3–1765), at this point a lieutenant general, was noted for reckless bravery.[Return to reference 8](#)

## [WOUNDED IN INDIA]

James Gray (for that was the name she took upon herself) was one of the party that was ordered under Lieutenant Campbell, of the Independent Companies, to fetch up some stores from the waterside that had been landed out of the fleet;<sup>9</sup> in doing which they had several skirmishes, and one of the common men was shot dead close on her right side; upon which she fired and killed the very man that shot her comrade; and was very near Lieutenant Campbell when he dropped.

She was also in the first party of the English foot that forded the river to get over to Pondicherry, which took her up to her breast, it being so deep; and was likewise very dangerous, as the French kept continually firing on them from a battery of twelve guns.

On the 11th of August she was put on the picquet guard<sup>1</sup> seven nights successively; and was one of a party that lay two days and two nights without any covering in going through the barrier; and as she was likewise put on duty in the trenches some part of the siege, she was obliged to sit or stand all the while near middle deep in water.

At the throwing up of the trenches she worked very hard for about fourteen days, and was paid 5d. English money per day, by one Mr. Melton, who had been at Goodman's Fields Wells<sup>2</sup> to see her since her singing at those wells.

I cannot help here reflecting on the numerous hardships, fatigues, and dangers she had already undergone since her taking upon herself the habit of a man, owing to the cruel usage of a wicked husband, whom vengeance pursued, as the reader will find in its proper places in the following pages;<sup>3</sup> therefore, in order to keep to the story of our heroine, I shall proceed in my history without further digression.

During all this long space of time, our heroine still maintained her wonted intrepidity, and behaved in every respect consistent with the character of a brave British soldier; and notwithstanding she stood

so deep in water, she fired no less than thirty-seven rounds of shot; and during the engagement, received six shot in her right leg, and five in her left, and what affected her more than all the rest, one so dangerous in the groin that had she applied for any aid and assistance on that account, she must inevitably have discovered what she was resolutely bent at all adventures, if possible, to conceal.

I know the reader will be desirous to know how the ball was extracted out of her groin, and will imagine that it was next to an impossibility it could be performed without a discovery. Now to rectify the scruples of such, I shall relate this account, as attested by herself, which she said was that after she received the twelve wounds, as before mentioned, she remained all that day, and the following night, in the camp, before she was carried to the hospital, and after she was brought there, and laid in a kit,<sup>4</sup> she continued till next day in the greatest agony and pain, the ball still remaining in the flesh of that wound in her groin, and how to extract it she knew not, for she had not discovered to the surgeons that she had any other wound than those in her legs. This wound being so extreme painful, it almost drove her to the precipice of despair; she often thought of discovering herself, that by that means she might be freed from the unspeakable pain she endured, by having the ball taken out by one of the surgeons; but that resolution was soon banished, and she resolved to run all risks, even at the hazard of her life, rather than her sex should be known. Confirmed in this resolution, she communicated her design to a Black woman, who attended upon her, and could get at the surgeon's medicine, and desired her assistance; and her pain being so very great, that she was unable to endure it much longer, she intended to try an experiment upon herself, which was to endeavor to extract the ball out of that wound; but notwithstanding she discovered her pain and resolution to this Black, yet she did not let her know she was a woman. The Black readily came, and afforded her all the assistance she could, by bringing her lint and salve to dress the wound with, which she had recourse to, it being left in the wards where the



patients lay; for which act of friendship she made her a present of a rupee at her departure, which is 3s. 4d.<sup>5</sup> of the currency of that country, but here in England it goes for no more than 2s. 6d. Now the manner in which she extracted the ball was full hardy and desperate: she probed the wound with her finger till she came where the ball lay, and then upon feeling it, thrust in both her finger and thumb, and pulled it out. This was a very rough way of proceeding with one's own flesh; but of two evils, as she thought, this was the least, so rather choosing to have her flesh tore and mangled than her sex discovered. After this operation was performed, she applied some of the healing salves which the Black had brought her, by the help of which she made a perfect cure of that dangerous wound.

The reader will here observe the invincible courage and resolution of this woman who, in the midst of so many inconveniences as she daily encountered, should still be able to guard from a discovery of her sex; but indeed it appears she acted so artfully on every emergency as rendered any attempts of this kind abortive; for notwithstanding the wound she kept from the knowledge of the surgeons, by telling them, when they came to examine her, that all the wounds she had received were in her legs, which they readily believed; and by that means prevented any farther search.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 9: The ensuing narrative describes the English siege of the French East India Company garrison at the port of Pondicherry (now also known as Puducherry) on the southeast coast of India, led by Edward Boscawen (1711–1761), admiral and general, the last major action of the First Carnatic War (1746–48), which was the Indian theater of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48). The river that Snell crosses was

defended at a ford by a French fort at "Areopocong," the town of Ariyankuppam, near Pondicherry. "Independent Companies": such companies were responsible for guarding (garrisoning) particular locations, especially in British colonies, and were not attached to any regiment or battalion.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: A picket or piquet guard is an advance unit stationed ahead of the main force to provide early warning of and defense against an enemy attack.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Theater where Snell will perform after she leaves the military. "5d.": that is, five pennies (pennies were abbreviated *d*, after the Latin "denarius").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The text will offer a long account of James Summs's life after he left Snell, including his conviction and execution for a murder he committed in Genoa, though it is reported that he feels most guilty for abandoning his wife.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Cot.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Three shillings, four pence.[Return to reference 5](#)

## [MANAGING MANHOOD]

Here, however, there was one unavoidable misfortune that she was exposed to, and which she was obliged to struggle with, and bear up with courage, though contrary to her inclinations, and that was the insults of the sailors for want of having a rough beard as they had. And upon which score, when she had her head shaved, they would damn her, in their familiar way, and stigmatize her with the disagreeable title of Miss Molly Gray. As these taunts, however, were not only thrown out in jest, she would return the compliment not only with a smile and an oath,<sup>6</sup> but with a challenge of the best sailor of them all, though not so old as they, to prove herself as good a man as any of them on board, for any wager to be deposited in her master's hands.

Though she seemed not to resent the unlucky nickname they had given her, for very prudential reasons, yet it secretly created her many an uneasy hour: and though by her resolute and manly deportment, she prevented them from carrying the joke too far, yet she could not shake off the odious title till they arrived at Lisbon.

Though she said but little, and that without the least resentment, as before observed, in regard to the nickname she had brought with her to Lisbon, she was determined within herself to shake of that odious appellation in Portugal, if possible, and to behave in such a manner, that the secret she had hitherto kept locked up in her bosom might still remain altogether safe and unsuspected, that she should be happy as to arrive once more in her native country.

Whilst this vessel lay at anchor in the port of Lisbon, the ship's crew would frequently go on shore upon parties of pleasure: and when any such proposal was made by her comrades (for the secret purpose abovementioned) she would be one of the most forward to promote the scheme, and would seem to take a peculiar delight in carousing, or in the commission of any other youthful flights, that they were in reality fond of; though all her compliances were indeed forced, and all she did was the result of necessity, and not choice,

yet she played the part of a boon companion so naturally, and so far distant from what bore the least appearance to effeminacy, that she answered the end proposed. The name of *Miss Molly* was here perfectly buried in oblivion; for as she came into all their wildest measures with the utmost alacrity and readiness, she gave them no grounds to suspect her sex, or give her the least uneasiness on that score.

We shall instance one of the frolics she was there concerned in, only to give the reader an idea of our young adventurer's being a perfect actor. There was one of her intimate acquaintance who was not only a marine as well as herself, but one of her messmates likewise, by name Edward Jefferies, who used frequently to go on shore with her in quest of adventures. Amongst other frolics, these two cronies pursued an amour together, by contracting an acquaintance with two young women of the place, that had no nun's flesh about them.<sup>7</sup> Though neither of them, 'tis true, were to compare with our British beauties, yet the handsomest of the two was not only our heroine's favorite, but was as favorably received as her heart could wish.<sup>8</sup> Jefferies, however, would every now and then throw out an amorous glance at his comrade's mistress, and not being over-fond of his own, told our adventurer that as they were partners in their amours, he thought it was but just and reasonable that he should have a chance at least for a night's lodging with the object of his choice, which he ingeniously acknowledged, he liked much better than his own; and for that purpose he should think he acted fair and above board, would she allow of a toss up to determine the point in debate. Our heroine, in order to comply with her comrade's humor, readily consented to the proposition, notwithstanding she insisted on her absolute right and title, in order to enhance his favor. Accordingly, the moot point was to be determined, by throwing up cross or pile.<sup>9</sup> The lot, in short, luckily fell in favor of Jefferies's side; and though our heroine seemed to part with his mistress with some reluctance, yet to show her friendship and impartiality to her messmate, she delivered up her property in a very formal manner into his arms.

Jefferies highly delighted with his good fortune, and the generosity of his messmate, kept up an intimate correspondence with this Portuguese lady as long as the ship rode at anchor in the port, and retained a greater respect than ordinary for his impartial friend till their happy arrival together at the port of London.

When they set sail for England, the enamored Portugueses would fain have quitted their native place to have had the pleasure of a voyage with their sweethearts; but that indulgence could not be procured, by reason the captain had given express orders that no woman should be admitted on board on any pretense, however plausible however.

But the reader is here to observe, that the reason why this strict order was made was that our female heroine, being in the secret of the intention of the two Portuguese Amazons intending to come on board, had contrived to inform the officers of it; and she declares that her reasons for doing so was, lest by a further intimacy with them, it might be the cause of her sex being discovered.

Our heroine, by thus affecting a gaiety of heart, which was not sincere, and by acting such parts, as in secret gave her the utmost disgust, gave a new turn to her character, and her title to manhood was no more suspected; insomuch that she returned at last to her dear native home, as pure as when she first set out.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Curse. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: They were, that is, not at all like chaste nuns. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, Snell was as favorably received by the Portuguese woman as she could wish. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Heads or tails. "Toss up": flip of a coin. "To enhance his favor": to make the favor that Snell did him seem more significant. [Return to reference 9](#)

### [REVEALING WOMANHOOD]

In the midst of all their merriment, and some time before they parted by consent, our heroine being conscious to herself that two suits of clothing were due to her from the regiment,<sup>1</sup> proposed to sell them, fearing still she should lose the same if her sex was discovered; upon which she took 16s. for the two suits of regimental clothing.

The money being now paid, and our heroine having been determined to raise all the ready cash she could before she opened a new scene which she well knew would amuse them; I mean, an open and ingenious discovery of a secret that had been so long kept close, and which she proposed to reveal before they parted; prudently considering that she should never perhaps have so favorable an opportunity again of disclosing her sex to such a number of witnesses at once, who would at any time afterwards be ready to testify the truth of all her merry adventures, as well as the many hardships, fatigues, and imminent dangers she had with so much intrepidity and cheerfulness run through, which, had that important discovery been at that juncture omitted, she wisely reflected that it was very probable that her veracity might be called in question, and that most people might suspect her real adventures, as before particularly related, and look upon the narrative of her life as little better than a romance.<sup>2</sup>

As these motives induced our heroine to make an ingenious discovery of her sex before they parted, as judging it the most seasonable opportunity that could possibly offer itself, she proposed to the company, with her usual freedom and alacrity, to call for the reckoning, and discharge that in the first place, share and share alike, or at least she paid her share; and when that was done, she said, "Now gentlemen, I have one very material secret to disclose to you, and lend me your ears for one minute. 'Tis very probable, gentlemen, that we may not after this merry meeting be so happy as to meet all together at one time and at one place anymore; and 'tis

very probable likewise, that not one of you will ever see your friend and fellow soldier Jemmy Gray any more."

This she uttered in a soft melancholy tone; at which they started, and one and all (as Jemmy was always universally beloved) crying out "God forbid!"—With that she burst out laughing, and then added, "Why, gentlemen, Jemmy Gray, you will find, will, before we part, cast his skin like a snake, and become a new creature.—" And then, turning to her bedfellow Mr. Moody, and addressing herself to him more particularly than the rest, said in her jocular way, "Had you have known, Master Moody, who you had between a pair of sheets with you, you would have come to closer quarters.—In a word, gentlemen, I am as much a woman as my mother ever was, and my real name is Hannah Snell."

At this sudden and unexpected declaration the whole company stood astonished, but after they had pretty well recovered themselves from the consternation she had thrown them into, like Thomas of Didymus,<sup>3</sup> they began to grow hard of belief, and insisted that what she had advanced was all a fiction, and nothing but one of Jemmy's merry conceits to amuse them.

Her brother and sister, however, interposed, and assured them that they would attest the truth of this metamorphosis, if the company required it, upon oath.

This serious confirmation being allowed by them all sufficient to convince them of the matter of fact, they one and all expatiated very largely in their way, in her commendation. They all applauded her intrepidity and presence of mind as a soldier, in the most imminent dangers, even when death itself stared her in the face. In the next place, they sounded forth her praise, in regard to her peculiar dexterity and address<sup>4</sup> as a sailor, and one who very deservedly was taken notice of and highly respected on that account by her superior officers: they proceeded, from that part of her character, to be lavish in her praise with respect to her sincerity as a friend, and to her humane and compassionate regard for all fellow-soldiers and sailors in general, when indisposed, or under any other kind of distress, wherein it lay in her power (through the interest she had in some of

the superior officers) to procure them such relief as the nature of the case required.

They did not however stop here; they expatiated very largely on the evenness of her natural disposition, on the regularity of her conduct, and her peculiar presence of mind, when under the most imminent dangers.

They frankly acknowledged that they never heard her in the least murmur or complain at the toils and fatigues which she frequently underwent; and that she never appeared discontented (as ever they could perceive) though her situation was ever so bad; or in a word, any ways impatient, even when she labored under such a multiplicity of wounds, and felt the most agonizing pains.

As soon as these extraordinary encomiums<sup>5</sup> were over, the abovenamed Mr. Moody, who had been her bedfellow for two nights (as we have hinted before) and the party to whom our Hannah more particularly applied herself at the time of her discovery, was so pleased with the agreeable manner in which she did it, and the encomiums which her comrades gave her, which he was very sensible were no more than the just results of her extraordinary merits, carried the testimonies of his respects to a much higher pitch than any of his comrades; for he protested solemnly and seriously that he was become all on a sudden so enamored with her, on account of her numerous and praiseworthy qualifications, that if Mrs. Hannah had as favorable opinion of him as he had of her, he was very ready and willing to commit matrimony with her that very hour, as in incontestable demonstration of the sincerity of his love and affection.

Though our Hannah made him all the grateful acknowledgments that could be desired for such an unexpected and open declaration of his esteem; yet she modestly refused the generous offer, upon reflecting under what unhappy circumstances she had been in, and what miseries and misfortunes she had been reduced to through the hard-heartedness and inhumanity of a former husband, and was fully determined, if she knew her own mind, never to submit herself to the marriage-yoke<sup>6</sup> any more.



\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Upon her discharge from the military, Snell and her companions celebrate in an alehouse, along with her sister and brother-in-law. She has already secured the pay for her service and for being wounded (£15) and is still owed two suits of clothes.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Fiction.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: One of Jesus's twelve apostles, known as "Doubting Thomas."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Skill. "Peculiar": exceptional.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Declarations of praise.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The bounds of matrimony. Despite this resolution, Snell did marry two more times: to Samuel Eyles, a carpenter, in 1759, with whom she had two children and, after Eyles's death, to a Richard Habgood, in 1772.[Return to reference 6](#)

### [A PUBLIC FIGURE]

It is demonstrable that our heroine (ever since the discovery of her sex to the public) has generously disdained to live a life of indolence and ease; but has shown a more than ordinary ambition to render herself conspicuous in the military way; and the amazing success which she met with on her benefit night at the New Wells in Goodman's Fields,<sup>7</sup> through her common dexterity and address in representing the jovial tar,<sup>8</sup> and the well-disciplined marine, is an incontestable demonstration.

What she did that night, and what additional performances she has exhibited since, has induced the manager of the said house to enter into a contract with her to pay her a weekly salary for the season, which is such a stipend, that no one woman in ten thousand, of her low extraction and want of literature,<sup>9</sup> could, by any act of industry (how laborious soever) with any possibility procure.

As we have brought our heroine on the public stage, and as she, by her wonted presence of mind, and unwearied application to that her casual profession for her present maintenance and support, we imagine a particular detail of all her several performances, together with a transcript of the most humorous and entertaining songs, with which she continues to divert the town, and that too with universal applause, will be thought no disagreeable amusement.<sup>1</sup>

But before we enter on that detail, give us leave to make a few cursory reflections on her extraordinary merit, which, in our humble opinion, must needs place her on a level with the most celebrated ancient heroines. She ought not to be entered on the same list with the late famous Pamela,<sup>2</sup> who for some time alarmed the town with her extraordinary virtues: those, we are all sensible, were imaginary only, and the result of an artful bookseller, or author's brains, who entertained the public, to his no small emolument, with a fabulous story of a lady of his own creating, one that never in reality had any existence; whereas the virtue and chastity in particular of our

heroine, who is no shadow, but true flesh and blood, have been amply displayed in one of the remotest corners of the world; and doubtless will now be displayed all over Europe with equal luster. With what amazing art did she conceal her sex, and by that means preserve her chastity amongst a whole crowd of military men, at the famous siege of Pondicherry, of which we have given we hope a satisfactory account already? With what intrepidity, with what presence of mind, did she behave when on the stormy ocean in a leaky vessel,<sup>3</sup> just ready to sink into the unfathomable abyss? Who, of all the most skillful sailors, was more active and resolute than she was? What marine, how well soever disciplined, ever exercised his small arms better on the poop and quarterdeck than she did? In a word, who fired his pontoon, who brandished his sword with more bravery, and in the attack of the enemy, who with more undaunted courage exposed himself to greater dangers than she did, or who testified a greater readiness to lay down her life for the service of her country, than our female adventurer? If these, and a thousand other instances too tedious to repeat, will not give our heroine an indisputable right and title to as high a character for her honor and virtue as the famed Pamela, though a fictitious one, I am greatly mistaken, and shall freely submit them to the superior judgment of our impartial readers.

## Endnotes

1750

- Note 7: The location in East London was the site of several successive theaters: Snell performed her maneuvers there along with other variety acts. "Benefit night": night at which the proceeds of ticket sales go entirely to the performer.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Nickname for a sailor.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Learning, education.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Later in the narrative, Walker provides a detailed account of Snell's performance, and lyrics to songs she sang.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Heroine of the sensationally successful and vastly influential novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson (1689–1761). Pamela, like Snell, is a chaste young woman of the laboring classes whose virtue prevails in dangerous circumstances.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The narrative had earlier given an account of Snell's bravery in helping see the ship on which she served, the *Swallow*, through extremely stormy seas on a voyage from Lisbon to Cape Town.[Return to reference 3](#)

## ELIZABETH CARTER

Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806) was a distinguished member of the Bluestocking circle, a group of intellectual women and their male supporters that began meeting in the 1750s, led by Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800). Gifted in languages, Carter published books of poems and numerous translations, and attained an eminence of reputation as a scholar by producing the first English translation of the complete extant works of Epictetus (ca. 50–135 C.E.), the ancient Greek Stoic philosopher. In the following poem, which first appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1741 and later in her 1762 *Poems on Several Occasions*, she gives a witty account of the struggles undergone by the embodied intellect, turning everything “quite upside down” by gendering the mind as female, and depicting the body as its complaining husband.

## A Dialogue

Says Body to Mind, "'tis amazing to see,  
We're so nearly related yet never agree,  
But lead a most wrangling strange sort of a life,  
As great plagues to each other as husband and wife.  
The fault is all yours, who with flagrant oppression,  
5 Encroach every day on my lawful possession.  
The best room<sup>1</sup> in my house you have seized for  
your own,  
And turned the whole tenement quite upside down,  
While you hourly call in a disorderly crew  
Of vagabond rogues,<sup>2</sup> who have nothing to do  
10 But to run in and out, hurry scurry, and keep  
Such a horrible uproar, I can't get to sleep.  
There's my kitchen<sup>3</sup> sometimes is as empty as  
sound,  
I call for my servants,<sup>4</sup> not one's to be found:  
They are all sent out on your ladyship's errand,  
15 To fetch some more riotous guests in, I warrant!  
And since things are growing, I see, worse and  
worse,  
I'm determined to force you to alter your course."  
Poor Mind, who heard all with extreme  
moderation,  
20 Thought it now time to speak, and make her  
allegation.  
"'Tis I that, methinks, have most cause to complain,  
Who am cramped and confined, like a slave in a  
chain.  
I did but step out, on some weighty affairs,  
To visit, last night, my good friends in the stars,

25 When, before I was got half as high as the moon,  
 You dispatched Pain and Languor to hurry me down;  
 Vi & Armis<sup>5</sup> they seized me, in midst of my flight,  
 And shut me in caverns as dark as the night."  
 "'Twas no more," replied Body, "than what you  
 deserved,  
 30 While you rambled abroad, I at home was half  
 starved:  
 And, unless I had closely confined you in hold,  
 You had left me to perish with hunger and cold."  
 "I've a friend,"<sup>6</sup> answers Mind, "who, though slow, is  
 yet sure,  
 And will rid me, at last, of your insolent power:  
 35 Will knock down your mud walls,<sup>7</sup> the whole fabric<sup>o</sup>  
 demolish,  
 And at once your strong holds and my slavery  
 abolish:  
 And while in the dust your dull ruins decay,  
 I shall snap off my chains, and fly freely away."

## Endnotes

1741, 1762

- Note 1: "The Head" [*Carter's note, 1741*].[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "The Thoughts" [*Carter's note, 1741*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "The Stomach" [*Carter's note, 1741*].[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "The Spirits" [*Carter's note, 1741*].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: With force and arms (Latin): *trespass vi et armis* is a kind of lawsuit alleging a violent trespass against someone's person or property.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "Death" [*Carter's note, 1741*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In the Bible, our bodies are commonly said to be "earthen vessels" (see 2 Corinthians 4:7).[Return to reference 7](#)

# Notes

- °: *building*[Return to reference °](#)



## HESTER CHAPONE

From a young age, Hester Chapone (1727–1801) led the life of an intellectual woman. Her father, Thomas Mulso, was a gentleman farmer who encouraged her literary pursuits (her mother reportedly did not). She met numerous writers in her twenties and engaged in a well-known correspondence (1750–51) with Samuel Richardson, which challenged and impressed the older novelist. After a marriage of ten months to John Chapone, a lawyer, ended with his death in 1761, she continued to cultivate long, important friendships with talented women, including Elizabeth Carter and Elizabeth Montagu, both eminent members of the Bluestocking circle, which supported women's intellectual achievements. At Montagu's suggestion in 1770, Chapone decided to turn the letters of advice she had been sending her young niece since 1765 into a book. The result, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady*, appeared in 1773 and ran to numerous editions into the nineteenth century.

Chapone's *Letters* are an outstanding, influential example of the conduct book, a genre directed particularly at middle-class young women, urging them to live useful, morally vigilant, modest lives. Most were written by men: notable among them were the *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) by James Fordyce (1720–1796; see [p. 707](#)) and *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1774) by John Gregory (1724–1773), who tells its addressees to keep their learning to themselves if they wish to attract husbands. Chapone instead recommends that young women explore as many branches of respectable knowledge as they can, including not just household management but also literature, history, the Christian religion, botany, astronomy, the list goes on. (She warns her addressee about novels, advising her "never to read any thing of the sentimental kind" without guidance.) Mary Wollstonecraft, the great feminist author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), singled out Chapone among other conduct-book writers: "Mrs. Chapone's *Letters*

are written with such good sense, and unaffected humility, and contain so many useful observations, that I only mention them to pay the worthy writer this tribute of respect." (Wollstonecraft had only disdain for the deceptive, constricting advice of Fordyce and Gregory.) The selection below elaborates Chapone's views of a social arena of paramount importance to her and to countless other women of the eighteenth-century leisured classes: the emotionally full, mutually supportive female friendship. She inculcates traditional moral and religious teachings, warning young women to choose friends with special care, alert to the dangers of levity and vanity. But instead of adhering to these virtues merely to please fathers and potential husbands, young women should embrace them, according to Chapone, to keep themselves emotionally satisfied, safe, and in as much control of their own lives as possible.

# ***From Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady***

## ***From Letter V: On the Regulation of the Affections***

It is a melancholy consideration that the judgment can only be formed by experience, which generally comes too late for our own use, and is seldom accepted for that of others.—I fear it is in vain for me to tell you what dangerous mistakes I made in the early choice of friends—how incapable I then was of finding out such as were fit for me, and how little I was acquainted with the true nature of friendship, when I thought myself most fervently engaged in it!—I am sensible<sup>1</sup> all this will hardly persuade you to choose by the eyes of others, or even to suspect that your own may be deceived.—Yet, if you should give any weight to my observations, it may not be quite useless to mention to you some of the essential requisites in a friend; and to exhort you never to choose one in whom they are wanting.

The first of these is a deep and sincere regard for religion.—If your friend draws her principles from the same source with yourself, if the gospel precepts are the rule of her life, as well as of yours, you will always know what to expect from her, and have one common standard of right and wrong to refer to, by which to regulate all material points of conduct. The woman who thinks lightly of sacred things, or who is ever heard to speak of them with levity or indifference, cannot reasonably be expected to pay a more serious regard to the laws of friendship, or to be uniformly punctual in the performance of any of the duties of society:—take no such person to your bosom, however recommended by good humor, wit, or any other qualification; nor let gaiety or thoughtlessness be deemed an excuse for offending in this important point.

\* \* \*

A due regard to reputation is the next indispensable qualification.—“Have regard to thy name,” saith the wise son of Sirach, “for that will continue with thee above a thousand great treasures of gold.”<sup>2</sup>—The young person who is careless of blame, and indifferent to the esteem of the wise and prudent part of the world, is not only a most dangerous companion, but gives a certain proof of the want of rectitude in her own mind.—Discretion is the guardian of all the virtues; and, when she forsakes them, they cannot long resist the attacks of an enemy.—There is a profligacy of spirit in defying the rules of decorum, and despising censure, which seldom ends otherwise than in extreme corruption and utter ruin.—Modesty and prudence are qualities that early display themselves, and are easily discerned: where these do not appear, you should avoid not only friendship, but every step towards intimacy, lest your own character should suffer with that of your companion; but, where they shine forth in any eminent degree, you may safely cultivate an acquaintance, in the reasonable hope of finding the solid fruits of virtue beneath such sweet and promising blossoms: should you be disappointed, you will at least have run no risk in the search after them, and may cherish as a creditable acquaintance the person so adorned, though she may not deserve a place in your inmost heart.

The understanding must next be examined:—and this is a point which requires so much understanding to judge of in another, that I must earnestly recommend to you not to rely entirely on your own, but to take the opinion of your older friends.—I do not wish you to seek for bright and uncommon talents, though these are sources of inexhaustible delight and improvement, when found in company with solid judgment and sound principles.—Good sense (by which I mean a capacity for reasoning justly, and discerning truly) applied to the uses of life, and exercised in distinguishing characters and directing conduct, is alone *necessary* to an intimate connection; but without this, the best intentions—though certain of reward hereafter—may fail of producing their effects in this life; nor can they singly constitute the character of an useful and valuable friend.—On the other hand, the most dazzling genius, or the most engaging wit and

humor, can but ill answer the purposes of friendship, without plain common sense and a faculty of just reasoning.

What can one do with those who will not be answered with reason—and who, when you are endeavoring to convince or persuade them by serious argument, will parry the blow with a witty repartee, or a stroke of poignant raillery?—I know not whether such a reply is less provoking than that of an obstinate fool, who answers your strongest reasons with—“What you say may be very true, but this is my way of thinking.”—

\* \* \*

Fancy,<sup>3</sup> I know, will have her share in friendship, as well as in love;—you must please as well as serve me before I can love you as the friend of my heart.—But the faculties that please for an evening may not please for life.—The humorous man soon runs through his stock of odd stories, mimicry, and jest; and the wit, by constantly repeated flashes, confounds and tires one’s intellect, instead of enlivening it with agreeable surprise:—but good sense can neither tire nor wear out;—it improves by exercise—and increases in value, the more it is known:—the pleasure it gives in conversation is lasting and satisfactory, because it is accompanied with improvement;—its worth is proportioned to the occasion that calls for it, and rises highest on the most interesting topics;—the heart, as well as the understanding, finds its account in it;—and our noblest interests are promoted by the entertainment we receive from such a companion.

A good temper is the next qualification \* \* \*. But as this is a quality in which you may be deceived, without a long and intimate acquaintance, you must not be hasty in forming connections before you have had sufficient opportunity for making observations on this head.—A young person, when pleased and enlivened by the presence of her youthful companions, seldom shows ill temper; which must be extreme indeed, if it is not at least controllable in such situations. But, you must watch her behavior to her own family, and the degree of estimation she stands in with them.—Observe her manner to servants and inferiors—to children—and even to animals.

—See in what manner she bears disappointments, contradiction, and restraint; and what degree of vexation she expresses on any accident of loss or trouble. If in such little trials she shows a meek, resigned, and cheerful temper, she will probably preserve it on greater occasions; but if she is impatient and discontented under these, how will she support the far greater evils which may await her in her progress through life? If you should have an opportunity of seeing her in sickness, observe whether her complaints are of a mild and gentle kind—forced from her by pain, and restrained as much as possible—or whether they are expressions of a turbulent, rebellious mind, that hardly submits to the divine hand. See whether she is tractable, considerate, kind, and grateful to those about her; or whether she takes the opportunity, which their compassion gives her, to tyrannize over and torment them. Women are in general very liable to ill health, which must necessarily make them in some measure troublesome and disagreeable to those they live with.—They should therefore take the more pains to lighten the burden as much as possible, by patience and good humor; and be careful not to let their infirmities break in on the health, freedom, or enjoyments of others, more than is needful and just.—Some ladies seem to think it very improper for any person within their reach to enjoy a moment's comfort while they are in pain; and make no scruple of sacrificing to their own least convenience, whenever they are indisposed, the proper rest, meals, or refreshments of their servants, and even sometimes of their husbands and children. But their selfishness defeats its own purpose, as it weakens that affection and tender pity which excites the most assiduous services, and affords the most healing balm to the heart of the sufferer.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

1773

- Note 1: Aware. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Ecclesiasticus 41:12. This book, not to be confused with Ecclesiastes, is also known as the Book of Sirach and is included among the apocryphal books of the Bible in the Anglican, King James Version, though it was accepted as canonical in the Roman Catholic and other traditions.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Here, a powerful, perhaps nonrational attraction to or fondness for a particular person.[Return to reference 3](#)

# **SAMUEL JOHNSON**

## **1709–1784**

Samuel Johnson was famous as a talker in his own time, and his conversation (preserved by James Boswell and others) has been famous ever since. But his wisdom survives above all in his writings: a few superb poems; the grave *Rambler* essays, which established his reputation as a stylist and a moralist; the lessons about life in *Rasselas* and the *Lives of the Poets*; and literary criticism that ranks among the best in English. The virtues of the talk and the writings are the same. They come hot from a mind well stored with knowledge, searingly honest, humane, and quick to seize the unexpected but appropriate image of truth. Johnson's wit is timeless, for it deals with the great facts of human experience, with hope and happiness and loss and duty and the fear of death. Whatever topic he addresses, whatever the form in which he writes, he holds to one commanding purpose: to see life as it is.

Two examples must suffice here. When Anna Williams wondered why a man should make a beast of himself through drunkenness, Johnson answered that "he who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man." In this reply Williams's tired metaphor is so charged with an awareness of the dark aspects of human life that it comes almost unbearably alive. Such moments characterize Johnson's writings as well. For instance, in reviewing the book of a fatuous would-be philosopher who blandly explained away the pains of poverty by declaring that a kindly providence compensates the



poor by making them more hopeful, more healthy, more easily pleased, and less sensitive than the rich, Johnson retorted: "The poor indeed are insensible of many little vexations which sometimes embitter the possessions and pollute the enjoyments of the rich. They are not pained by casual incivility, or mortified by the mutilation of a compliment; but this happiness is like that of a malefactor who ceases to feel the cords that bind him when the pincers are tearing his flesh."

Johnson had himself known the pains of poverty. During his boyhood and youth in Lichfield, his father's bookshop and other businesses plunged into debt, so that he was forced to leave Oxford before he had taken a degree. An early marriage to a well-to-do widow, Elizabeth ("Tetty") Porter, more than twenty years older than he, enabled him to open a school. But the school failed, and he moved to London to make his way as a writer. The years between 1737, when he first arrived there with his pupil David Garrick (who later became the leading actor of his generation), and 1755, when the publication of the *Dictionary* established his reputation, were often difficult. He supported himself at first as best he could by doing hack work for the *Gentleman's Magazine*, but gradually his own original writings began to attract attention.

In 1747 Johnson published the Plan of his *Dictionary*, and he spent the next seven years compiling it—although he had expected to finish it in three. When in 1748 Dr. Adams, a friend from Oxford days, questioned his ability to carry out such a work alone so fast and reminded him that the *Dictionary* of the French Academy had needed forty academicians working for forty years, Johnson replied with humorous jingoism: "Sir, thus it is. This is the proportion. Let me see; forty times forty is sixteen hundred. As three to sixteen hundred, so is the proportion of an Englishman to a Frenchman."

Johnson's achievement in compiling the *Dictionary* seems even greater when we realize that he was writing some of his best essays and poems during the same period. Although the booksellers who published the *Dictionary* paid him what was then the large sum of £1575, it was not enough to enable him to support his household,

buy materials, and pay the wages of the six assistants whom he employed year by year until the task was accomplished. He therefore had to earn more money by writing. In 1749, his early tragedy *Irene* (pronounced *I-re-ně*) was produced at long last by his old friend Garrick, by then the manager of Drury Lane. The play was not a success, although Johnson made some profit from it. In the same year appeared his finest poem, "The Vanity of Human Wishes." With the *Rambler* (1750–52) and the *Idler* (1758–60), two series of periodical essays, Johnson found a devoted audience, but his pleasure was tempered by the death of his wife in 1752. He never remarried.

Johnson is thought of as the great generalizer, but what gives his generalizations strength is that they are rooted in the particulars of his self-knowledge. He had constantly to fight against what he called "filling the mind" with illusions to avoid the call of duty, his own black melancholy, and the realities of life. The portrait (largely a self-portrait) of Sober in *Idler* 31 is revealing: he occupies his idle hours with crafts and hobbies and has now taken up chemistry—he "sits and counts the drops as they come from his retort, and forgets that, whilst a drop is falling, a moment flies away."

His theme of themes is expressed in the title "The Vanity of Human Wishes": the dangerous but all-pervasive power of wishful thinking, the feverish intrusion of desires and hopes that distort reality and lead to false expectations. Almost all of Johnson's major writings—verse satire, moral essay, or the prose fable *Rasselas* (1759)—express this theme. In *Rasselas* it is called "the hunger of imagination, which preys upon life," picturing things as one would like them to be, not as they are. The travelers who are the fable's protagonists pursue some formula for happiness; they reflect our naive hope, against the lessons of experience, that one choice of life will make us happy forever.

Johnson also developed a style of his own: balanced, extended sentences, phrases, or clauses moving to carefully controlled rhythms, in language that is characteristically general, often Latinate, and frequently polysyllabic. This style is far from Swift's

simplicity or Addison's neatness, but it never becomes obscure or turgid, for even a very complex sentence reveals—as it should—the structure of the thought, and the learned words are always precisely used. While reading early scientists to collect words for the *Dictionary*, Johnson developed a new vocabulary: for example, *obtund*, *exuberate*, *fugacity*, and *frigorific*. But he used many of these strange words in conversation as well as in his writings, often with a peculiarly Johnsonian felicity, describing the operations of the mind with a scientific precision.

After Johnson received his pension from the Crown in 1762, he no longer had to write for a living, and because he held that “no man but a blockhead” ever wrote for any other reason, he produced as little as he decently could during the last twenty years of his life. His edition of Shakespeare, long delayed, was published in 1765, with a fine preface and fascinating notes. His last important work is the *Lives of the Poets*, which came out in two parts in 1779 and 1781. These biographical and critical prefaces were commissioned by a group of booksellers who had joined together to publish a large collection of the English poets and who wished to give their venture the prestige that Johnson would lend it. The poets to be included (except for four insisted on by Johnson) were selected by the booksellers according to current fashions. Therefore the collection begins with Abraham Cowley and John Milton and ends with Thomas Gray, and it omits such standard poets as Chaucer, Spenser, Sidney, Donne, and Marvell.

The ideal poet, according to Johnson, has a genius for making the things we see every day seem new. The same might be said of Johnson himself as a critic. Johnson is the great champion, in criticism, of common sense and the common reader. Without denying the right of the poet to flights of imagination, he also insists that poems must make sense, please readers, and help us not only understand the world but cope with it. Johnson holds poems to the truth, as he sees it: the principles of nature, logic, religion, and morality. Not even Shakespeare can be excused when “he sacrifices virtue to convenience” and “seems to write without any moral

purpose." Yet Johnson is no worshiper of authority or mere "correctness." As a critic he is always the empiricist, testing theory by practice. He is determined to judge literature by its truth to life, not by abstract rules, and is never afraid to state the obvious, whether the lack of human interest in *Paradise Lost* or Shakespeare's temptation by puns. But at its best, as in the praise of Milton or Shakespeare, his criticism engages some of the deepest questions about literature: why it endures, and how it helps us endure.

**The Vanity of Human Wishes** This poem is an imitation of Juvenal's *Satire* 10. Although it closely follows the order and the ideas of the Latin poem, it remains a very personal work, for Johnson has used the Roman Stoic's satire as a means of expressing his own sense of the tragic and comic in human life. He has tried to reproduce in English verse the qualities he thought especially Juvenalian: stateliness, pointed sentences, and declamatory grandeur. The poem is difficult because of the extreme compactness of the style: every line is forced to convey the greatest possible amount of meaning. Johnson believed that "great thoughts are always general," but he certainly did not intend that the general should fade into the abstract: observe, for example, how he makes personified nouns concrete, active, and dramatic by using them as subjects of active and dramatic verbs: "Hate *dogs* their flight, and Insult *mocks* their end" (line 78). But the difficulty of the poem is also related to its theme, the difficulty of seeing anything clearly on this earth. In a world of blindness and illusion, human beings must struggle to find a point of view that will not deceive them, and a happiness that can last.

# The Vanity of Human Wishes

## *In Imitation of the Tenth Satire of Juvenal*

Let Observation, with extensive view,  
Survey mankind, from China to Peru;  
Remark each anxious toil, each eager strife,  
And watch the busy scenes of crowded life;  
5 Then say how hope and fear, desire and hate  
O’erspread with snares the clouded maze of fate,  
Where wavering man, betrayed by venturous Pride  
To tread the dreary paths without a guide,  
As treacherous phantoms in the mist delude,  
Shuns fancied ills, or chases airy good.  
10 How rarely Reason guides the stubborn choice,  
Rules the bold hand, or prompts the suppliant voice;  
How nations sink, by darling schemes oppressed,  
When Vengeance listens to the fool’s request.  
Fate wings with every wish the afflictive dart,  
15 Each gift of nature, and each grace of art;  
With fatal heat impetuous courage glows,  
With fatal sweetness elocution flows,  
Impeachment stops the speaker’s powerful breath,  
And restless fire precipitates on death.  
20 But scarce observed, the knowing and the bold  
Fall in the general massacre of gold;  
Wide-wasting pest! that rages unconfined,  
And crowds with crimes the records of mankind;  
For gold his sword the hireling ruffian draws,  
25 For gold the hireling judge distorts the laws;  
Wealth heaped on wealth, nor truth nor safety buys,  
The dangers gather as the treasures rise.  
Let History tell where rival kings command,

30 And dubious title<sup>o</sup> shakes the madded land,  
When statutes glean the refuse of the sword,  
How much more safe the vassal than the lord;  
Low skulks the hind<sup>o</sup> beneath the rage of power,  
And leaves the wealthy traitor in the Tower,<sup>1</sup>  
Untouched his cottage, and his slumbers sound,  
35 Though Confiscation's vultures hover round.  
The needy traveler, serene and gay,  
Walks the wild heath, and sings his toil away.  
Does envy seize thee? crush the upbraiding joy,  
Increase his riches and his peace destroy;  
40 New fears in dire vicissitude invade,  
The rustling brake<sup>o</sup> alarms, and quivering shade,  
Nor light nor darkness bring his pain relief,  
One shows the plunder, and one hides the thief.  
Yet still one general cry the skies assails,  
45 And gain and grandeur load the tainted gales;  
Few know the toiling statesman's fear or care,  
The insidious rival and the gaping heir.  
Once more, Democritus,<sup>2</sup> arise on earth,  
With cheerful wisdom and instructive mirth,  
50 See motley life in modern trappings dressed,  
And feed with varied fools the eternal jest:  
Thou who couldst laugh where Want enchained  
Caprice,  
Toil crushed Conceit, and man was of a piece;  
Where Wealth unloved without a mourner died;  
55 And scarce a sycophant was fed by Pride;  
Where ne'er was known the form of mock debate,  
Or seen a new-made mayor's unwieldy state;<sup>3</sup>  
Where change of favorites made no change of laws,  
And senates heard before they judged a cause;  
60 How wouldst thou shake at Britain's modish tribe,  
Dart the quick taunt, and edge the piercing gibe?  
Attentive truth and nature to descry,

And pierce each scene with philosophic eye.  
To thee were solemn toys or empty show  
65 The robes of pleasure and the veils of woe:  
All aid the farce, and all thy mirth maintain,  
Whose joys are causeless, or whose griefs are vain.  
Such was the scorn that filled the sage's mind,  
Renewed at every glance on human kind;  
70 How just that scorn ere yet thy voice declare,  
Search every state, and canvass every prayer.  
Unnumbered suppliants crowd Preferment's gate,  
Athirst for wealth, and burning to be great;  
Delusive Fortune hears the incessant call,  
75 They mount, they shine, evaporate,<sup>4</sup> and fall.  
On every stage the foes of peace attend,  
Hate dogs their flight, and Insult mocks their end.  
Love ends with hope, the sinking statesman's door  
Pours in the morning worshiper no more;<sup>5</sup>  
80 For growing names the weekly scribbler lies,  
To growing wealth the dedicator flies;  
From every room descends the painted face,  
That hung the bright palladium<sup>6</sup> of the place;  
And smoked in kitchens, or in auctions sold,  
85 To better features yields the frame of gold;  
For now no more we trace in every line  
Heroic worth, benevolence divine:  
The form distorted justifies the fall,  
And Detestation rids the indignant wall.  
90 But will not Britain hear the last appeal,  
Sign her foes' doom, or guard her favorites' zeal?  
Through Freedom's sons no more remonstrance  
rings,  
Degrading nobles and controlling kings;  
Our supple tribes repress their patriot throats,  
95 And ask no questions but the price of votes;  
With weekly libels and septennial ale,<sup>7</sup>



Their wish is full to riot and to rail.

100 In full-blown dignity, see Wolsey<sup>8</sup> stand,  
Law in his voice, and fortune in his hand:  
To him the church, the realm, their powers consign,  
Through him the rays of regal bounty shine;  
Turned by his nod the stream of honor flows,  
His smile alone security bestows:  
105 Still to new heights his restless wishes tower,  
Claim leads to claim, and power advances power;  
Till conquest unresisted ceased to please,  
And rights submitted, left him none to seize.  
At length his sovereign frowns—the train of state  
Mark the keen glance, and watch the sign to hate.  
110 Where'er he turns, he meets a stranger's eye,  
His suppliants scorn him, and his followers fly;  
At once is lost the pride of awful state,  
The golden canopy, the glittering plate,  
The regal palace, the luxurious board,  
115 The liveried army, and the menial lord.  
With age, with cares, with maladies oppressed,  
He seeks the refuge of monastic rest.  
Grief aids disease, remembered folly stings,  
And his last sighs reproach the faith of kings.  
120 Speak thou, whose thoughts at humble peace  
repine,  
Shall Wolsey's wealth, with Wolsey's end be thine?  
Or liv'st thou now, with safer pride content,  
The wisest justice on the banks of Trent?  
For why did Wolsey, near the steep of fate,  
125 On weak foundations raise the enormous weight?  
Why but to sink beneath misfortune's blow,  
With louder ruin to the gulfs below?  
What gave great Villiers<sup>9</sup> to the assassin's knife,  
And fixed disease on Harley's<sup>1</sup> closing life?  
130 What murdered Wentworth, and what exiled Hyde,<sup>2</sup>

By kings protected, and to kings allied?  
What but their wish indulged in courts to shine,  
And power too great to keep or to resign?  
When first the college rolls receive his name,  
135 The young enthusiast quits his ease for fame;  
Through all his veins the fever of renown  
Burns from the strong contagion of the gown:<sup>3</sup>  
O'er Bodley's dome<sup>4</sup> his future labors spread,  
And Bacon's<sup>5</sup> mansion trembles o'er his head.  
140 Are these thy views? proceed, illustrious youth,  
And Virtue guard thee to the throne of Truth!  
Yet should thy soul indulge the generous heat,  
Till captive Science<sup>o</sup> yields her last retreat;  
Should Reason guide thee with her brightest ray,  
145 And pour on misty Doubt resistless day;  
Should no false kindness lure to loose delight,  
Nor praise relax, nor difficulty fright;  
Should tempting Novelty thy cell refrain,  
And Sloth effuse her opiate fumes in vain;  
150 Should Beauty blunt on fops her fatal dart,  
Nor claim the triumph of a lettered heart;  
Should no disease thy torpid veins invade,  
Nor Melancholy's phantoms haunt thy shade;  
Yet hope not life from grief or danger free,  
155 Nor think the doom of man reversed for thee:  
Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes,  
And pause a while from letters, to be wise;  
There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,  
Toil, envy, want, the patron,<sup>6</sup> and the jail.  
160 See nations slowly wise, and meanly just,  
To buried merit raise the tardy bust.  
If dreams yet flatter, once again attend,  
Hear Lydiat's life, and Galileo's<sup>7</sup> end.  
Nor deem, when Learning her last prize bestows,  
165 The glittering eminence exempt from foes;

See when the vulgar 'scapes, despised or awed,  
Rebellion's vengeful talons seize on Laud.<sup>8</sup>  
From meaner minds, though smaller fines content,  
The plundered palace or sequestered rent;<sup>9</sup>  
170 Marked out by dangerous parts<sup>o</sup> he meets the shock,  
And fatal Learning leads him to the block:  
Around his tomb let Art and Genius weep,  
But hear his death, ye blockheads, hear and sleep.  
The festal blazes, the triumphal show,  
175 The ravished standard, and the captive foe,  
The senate's thanks, the gazette's pompous tale,  
With force resistless o'er the brave prevail.  
Such bribes the rapid Greek<sup>o</sup> o'er Asia whirled,  
For such the steady Romans shook the world;  
180 For such in distant lands the Britons shine,  
And stain with blood the Danube or the Rhine;  
This power has praise that virtue scarce can warm,  
Till fame supplies the universal charm.  
Yet Reason frowns on War's unequal game,  
185 Where wasted nations raise a single name,  
And mortgaged states their grandsires' wreaths  
regret  
From age to age in everlasting debt;  
Wreaths which at last the dear-bought right convey  
To rust on medals, or on stones decay.  
190 On what foundation stands the warrior's pride?  
How just his hopes, let Swedish Charles<sup>1</sup> decide;  
A frame of adamant, a soul of fire,  
No dangers fright him, and no labors tire;  
O'er love, o'er fear, extends his wide domain,  
195 Unconquered lord of pleasure and of pain;  
No joys to him pacific scepters yield,  
War sounds the trump, he rushes to the field;  
Behold surrounding kings their powers combine,  
And one capitulate, and one resign;<sup>2</sup>  
200

Peace courts his hand, but spreads her charms in  
vain;  
"Think nothing gained," he cries, "till naught remain,  
On Moscow's walls till Gothic standards fly,  
And all be mine beneath the polar sky."  
The march begins in military state,  
205 And nations on his eye suspended wait;  
Stern Famine guards the solitary coast,  
And Winter barricades the realms of Frost;  
He comes, nor want nor cold his course delay—  
Hide, blushing Glory, hide Pultowa's day:  
210 The vanquished hero leaves his broken bands,  
And shows his miseries in distant lands;  
Condemned a needy suppliant to wait,  
While ladies interpose, and slaves debate.  
But did not Chance at length her error mend?  
215 Did no subverted empire mark his end?  
Did rival monarchs give the fatal wound?  
Or hostile millions press him to the ground?  
His fall was destined to a barren strand,  
A petty fortress, and a dubious hand;<sup>3</sup>  
220 He left the name at which the world grew pale,  
To point a moral, or adorn a tale.  
All times their scenes of pompous woes afford,  
From Persia's tyrant to Bavaria's lord.<sup>4</sup>  
In gay hostility, and barbarous pride,  
225 With half mankind embattled at his side,  
Great Xerxes comes to seize the certain prey,  
And starves exhausted regions in his way;  
Attendant Flattery counts his myriads o'er,  
Till counted myriads soothe his pride no more;  
230 Fresh praise is tried till madness fires his mind,  
The waves he lashes, and enchains the wind;<sup>5</sup>  
New powers are claimed, new powers are still  
bestowed,

Till rude resistance lops the spreading god;  
The daring Greeks deride the martial show,  
235 And heap their valleys with the gaudy foe;  
The insulted sea with humbler thoughts he gains,  
A single skiff to speed his flight remains;  
The encumbered oar scarce leaves the dreaded  
coast  
Through purple billows and a floating host.  
240 The bold Bavarian, in a luckless hour,  
Tries the dread summits of Caesarean power,  
With unexpected legions bursts away,  
And sees defenseless realms receive his sway;  
Short sway! fair Austria spreads her mournful  
245 charms,  
The queen, the beauty, sets the world in arms;  
From hill to hill the beacon's rousing blaze  
Spreads wide the hope of plunder and of praise;  
The fierce Croatian, and the wild Hussar,<sup>6</sup>  
With all the sons of ravage crowd the war;  
250 The baffled prince in honor's flattering bloom  
Of hasty greatness finds the fatal doom,  
His foes' derision, and his subjects' blame,  
And steals to death from anguish and from shame.  
Enlarge my life with multitude of days!  
255 In health, in sickness, thus the suppliant prays;  
Hides from himself his state, and shuns to know,  
That life protracted is protracted woe.  
Time hovers o'er, impatient to destroy,  
And shuts up all the passages of joy;  
260 In vain their gifts the bounteous seasons pour,  
The fruit autumnal, and the vernal flower;  
With listless eyes the dotard views the store,  
He views, and wonders that they please no more;  
Now pall the tasteless meats, and joyless wines,  
265 And Luxury with sighs her slave resigns.

Approach, ye minstrels, try the soothing strain,  
Diffuse the tuneful lenitives of pain:○  
No sounds, alas! would touch the impervious ear,  
Though dancing mountains witnessed Orpheus<sup>z</sup>  
270       near;  
Nor lute nor lyre his feeble powers attend,  
Nor sweeter music of a virtuous friend,  
But everlasting dictates crowd his tongue,  
Perversely grave, or positively wrong.  
The still returning tale, and lingering jest,  
275       Perplex the fawning niece and pampered guest,  
While growing hopes scarce awe the gathering  
      sneer,  
And scarce a legacy can bribe to hear;  
The watchful guests still hint the last offense,  
The daughter's petulance, the son's expense,  
280       Improve○ his heady rage with treacherous skill,  
And mold his passions till they make his will.  
      Unnumbered maladies his joints invade,  
Lay siege to life and press the dire blockade;  
But unextinguished avarice still remains,  
285       And dreaded losses aggravate his pains;  
He turns, with anxious heart and crippled hands,  
His bonds of debt, and mortgages of lands;  
Or views his coffers with suspicious eyes,  
Unlocks his gold, and counts it till he dies.  
290       But grant, the virtues of a temperate prime  
Bless with an age exempt from scorn or crime;  
An age that melts with unperceived decay,  
And glides in modest innocence away;  
Whose peaceful day Benevolence endears,  
295       Whose night congratulating Conscience cheers;  
The general favorite as the general friend:  
Such age there is, and who shall wish its end?  
      Yet even on this her load Misfortune flings,

300 To press the weary minutes' flagging wings;  
New sorrow rises as the day returns,  
A sister sickens, or a daughter mourns.  
Now kindred Merit fills the sable bier,  
Now lacerated Friendship claims a tear;  
305 Year chases year, decay pursues decay,  
Still drops some joy from withering life away;  
New forms arise, and different views engage,  
Superfluous lags the veteran<sup>8</sup> on the stage,  
Till pitying Nature signs the last release,  
And bids afflicted Worth retire to peace.  
310 But few there are whom hours like these await,  
Who set unclouded in the gulfs of Fate.  
From Lydia's monarch<sup>9</sup> should the search descend,  
By Solon cautioned to regard his end,  
In life's last scene what prodigies surprise,  
315 Fears of the brave, and follies of the wise!  
From Marlborough's<sup>1</sup> eyes the streams of dotage  
flow,  
And Swift<sup>2</sup> expires a driveler and a show.  
The teeming mother, anxious for her race,<sup>o</sup>  
Begs for each birth the fortune of a face:  
320 Yet Vane<sup>3</sup> could tell what ills from beauty spring;  
And Sedley<sup>4</sup> cursed the form that pleased a king.  
Ye nymphs of rosy lips and radiant eyes,  
Whom Pleasure keeps too busy to be wise,  
Whom Joys with soft varieties invite,  
325 By day the frolic, and the dance by night;  
Who frown with vanity, who smile with art,  
And ask the latest fashion of the heart;  
What care, what rules your heedless charms shall  
save,  
Each nymph your rival, and each youth your slave?  
330 Against your fame with Fondness Hate combines,  
The rival batters, and the lover mines.<sup>5</sup>

With distant voice neglected Virtue calls,  
Less heard and less, the faint remonstrance falls;  
Tired with contempt, she quits the slippery reign,  
335 And Pride and Prudence take her seat in vain.  
In crowd at once, where none the pass defend,  
The harmless freedom, and the private friend.  
The guardians yield, by force superior plied:  
To Interest, Prudence; and to Flattery, Pride.  
340 Now Beauty falls betrayed, despised, distressed,  
And hissing Infamy proclaims the rest.  
Where then shall Hope and Fear their objects  
find?  
Must dull Suspense<sup>o</sup> corrupt the stagnant mind?  
Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,  
345 Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?  
Must no dislike alarm, no wishes rise,  
No cries invoke the mercies of the skies?  
Inquirer, cease; petitions yet remain,  
Which Heaven may hear, nor deem religion vain.  
350 Still raise for good the supplicating voice,  
But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice.  
Safe in his power, whose eyes discern afar  
The secret ambush of a specious prayer.  
Implore his aid, in his decisions rest,  
355 Secure, whate'er he gives, he gives the best.  
Yet when the sense of sacred presence fires,  
And strong devotion to the skies aspires,  
Pour forth thy fervors for a healthful mind,  
Obedient passions, and a will resigned;  
360 For love, which scarce collective man can fill;<sup>6</sup>  
For patience sovereign o'er transmuted ill;  
For faith, that panting for a happier seat,  
Counts death kind Nature's signal of retreat:  
365 These goods for man the laws of Heaven ordain,



These goods he grants, who grants the power to  
gain;  
With these celestial Wisdom calms the mind,  
And makes the happiness she does not find.

## Endnotes

1749

- Note 1: That is, the Tower of London, which served as a prison. Johnson first wrote “bonny traitor,” recalling the Jacobite uprising of 1745 and the execution of four of its Scot leaders.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A Greek philosopher of the late 5th century B.C.E., remembered as the “laughing philosopher” because men’s follies only moved him to mirth.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pomp. Mayors organized costly processions.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Disperse in vapors, like fireworks.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Statesmen gave interviews and received friends and petitioners at levees, or morning receptions.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An image of Pallas Athena that fell from heaven and was preserved at Troy. Not until it was stolen by Diomedes could the city fall to the Greeks.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Ministers and even the king freely bought support by bribing members of Parliament, who in turn won elections by buying votes. “Weekly libels”: politically motivated lampoons published in the weekly newspapers. “Septennial ale”: the ale given away by candidates at parliamentary elections, held at least every seven years.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Thomas Cardinal Wolsey (ca. 1475–1530), lord chancellor and favorite of Henry VIII. Shakespeare dramatized his fall in *Henry VIII*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham, favorite of James I and Charles I, was assassinated in 1628.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, chancellor of the exchequer and later lord treasurer under Queen Anne (1710–14), impeached and imprisoned by the Whigs in 1715.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon (“to kings allied” because his daughter married James, Duke of York), lord chancellor under Charles II (impeached in 1667, he fled to the Continent). Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, intimate and adviser of Charles I, impeached by the Long Parliament and executed in 1641.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Academic robe; here associated with the poisoned shirt that tormented Hercules.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Bodleian Library, Oxford.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Roger Bacon (ca. 1214–1294), scientist and philosopher, taught at Oxford, where his study, according to tradition, would collapse if a man greater than he should appear at Oxford.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In the first edition, “garret.” For the reason of the change see Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* (p. 888).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Astronomer (1564–1642) who was imprisoned as a heretic by the Inquisition in 1633; he died blind. Thomas Lydiat (1572–1646), Oxford scholar, died impoverished because of his Royalist sympathies.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Appointed archbishop of Canterbury by Charles I, William Laud followed rigorously High Church policies and was executed by order of the Long Parliament in 1645.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: During the Commonwealth, the estates of many Royalists were pillaged and their incomes confiscated (“sequestered”) by the state.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Charles XII of Sweden (1682–1718). Defeated by the Russians at Pultowa (1709), he escaped to Turkey and tried to form an alliance against Russia with the sultan. Returning to Sweden, he attacked Norway and was killed in the attack on Fredrikshald.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Frederick IV of Denmark capitulated to Charles in 1700. Augustus II of Poland resigned his throne to Charles in 1704.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: It was disputed whether Charles was shot by the enemy or by his own aide-de-camp.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Elector Charles Albert caused the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48) when he contested the crown of the empire with Maria Theresa (“Fair Austria” in line 245). “Persia’s tyrant”: Xerxes invaded Greece and was totally defeated in the sea battle off Salamis, 480 B.C.E.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: When storms destroyed Xerxes’ boats, he commanded his men to punish the wind and sea.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hungarian light cavalry.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A legendary poet who played on the lyre so beautifully that even stones were moved.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, of life, not of war.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Croesus, the wealthy and fortunate king, was warned by Solon not to count himself happy until he ceased to live. He lost his crown to Cyrus the Great of Persia.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, England’s brilliant general during most of the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Jonathan Swift, who passed the last four years of his life in utter senility.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Anne Vane, mistress of Frederick, Prince of Wales (son of George II).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Catherine Sedley, mistress of James II.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Plants mines beneath, as in the siege of a fortress.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Which humankind as a whole can hardly over-task.[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *claim of right*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *peasant*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *thicket*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *knowledge*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *accomplishments*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *Alexander the Great*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *painkillers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *increase*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *family*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *uncertainty*[Return to reference](#) °

# ***Rambler 60***

## **[BIOGRAPHY]**

*Saturday, October 13, 1750*

—*Quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non,  
Plenius ac melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit.*

—HORACE, *Epistles*, 1.2.3–4

Whose works the beautiful and base contain,  
Of vice and virtue more instructive rules,  
Than all the sober sages of the schools.

—FRANCIS

All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others is produced by an act of the imagination, that realizes the event, however fictitious, or approximates it,<sup>1</sup> however remote, by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever motions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves.

Our passions are therefore more strongly moved, in proportion as we can more readily adopt the pains or pleasure proposed to our minds, by recognizing them as once our own, or considering them as naturally incident to our state of life. It is not easy for the most artful writer to give us an interest in happiness or misery, which we think ourselves never likely to feel, and with which we have never yet been made acquainted. Histories of the downfall of kingdoms, and revolutions of empires, are read with great tranquility; the imperial tragedy pleases common auditors only by its pomp of ornament, and grandeur of ideas; and the man whose faculties have been engrossed by business, and whose heart never fluttered but at the

rise or fall of stocks, wonders how the attention can be seized, or the affections agitated, by a tale of love.

Those parallel circumstances, and kindred images to which we readily conform our minds, are, above all other writings, to be found in narratives of the lives of particular persons; and therefore no species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest, or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition.

The general and rapid narratives of history, which involve a thousand fortunes in the business of a day, and complicate<sup>2</sup> innumerable incidents in one great transaction, afford few lessons applicable to private life, which derives its comforts and its wretchedness from the right or wrong management of things, which nothing but their frequency makes considerable, *Parva si non fiunt quotidie*, says Pliny,<sup>3</sup> and which can have no place in those relations which never descend below the consultation of senates, the motions of armies, and the schemes of conspirators.

I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful. For, not only every man has in the mighty mass of the world great numbers in the same condition with himself, to whom his mistakes and miscarriages, escapes and expedients, would be of immediate and apparent use; but there is such an uniformity in the state of man, considered apart from adventitious and separable decorations and disguises, that there is scarce any possibility of good or ill, but is common to humankind. A great part of the time of those who are placed at the greatest distance by fortune, or by temper, must unavoidably pass in the same manner; and though, when the claims of nature are satisfied, caprice, and vanity, and accident, begin to produce discriminations and peculiarities, yet the eye is not very heedful or quick, which cannot discover the same causes still<sup>4</sup> terminating their influence in the same effects, though sometimes accelerated, sometimes retarded, or perplexed by multiplied combinations. We are all prompted by the same motives, all deceived by the same

fallacies, all animated by hope, obstructed by danger, entangled by desire, and seduced by pleasure.

It is frequently objected to relations of particular lives, that they are not distinguished by any striking or wonderful vicissitudes. The scholar who passed his life among his books, the merchant who conducted only his own affairs, the priest whose sphere of action was not extended beyond that of his duty, are considered as no proper objects of public regard, however they might have excelled in their several stations, whatever might have been their learning, integrity, and piety. But this notion arises from false measures of excellence and dignity, and must be eradicated by considering, that in the esteem of uncorrupted reason, what is of most use is of most value.

It is, indeed, not improper to take honest advantages of prejudice, and to gain attention by a celebrated name; but the business of the biographer is often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents, which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestic privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue. The account of Thuanus<sup>5</sup> is, with great propriety, said by its author to have been written, that it might lay open to posterity the private and familiar character of that man, *cujus ingenium et candorem ex ipsius scriptis sunt olim semper miraturi*, whose candor and genius will to the end of time be by his writings preserved in admiration.

There are many invisible circumstances which, whether we read as inquirers after natural or moral knowledge, whether we intend to enlarge our science, or increase our virtue, are more important than public occurrences. Thus Sallust, the great master of nature, has not forgot, in his account of Catiline,<sup>6</sup> to remark that *his walk was now quick, and again slow*, as an indication of a mind revolving something with violent commotion. Thus the story of Melancthon<sup>7</sup> affords a striking lecture on the value of time, by informing us that when he made an appointment, he expected not only the hour, but the minute to be fixed, that the day might not run out in the idleness

of suspense; and all the plans and enterprises of De Witt are now of less importance to the world, than that part of his personal character, which represents him as careful of his health, and negligent of his life.<sup>8</sup>

But biography has often been allotted to writers who seem very little acquainted with the nature of their task, or very negligent about the performance. They rarely afford any other account than might be collected from public papers, but imagine themselves writing a life when they exhibit a chronological series of actions or preferments; and so little regard the manners or behavior of their heroes, that more knowledge may be gained of a man's real character, by a short conversation with one of his servants, than from a formal and studied narrative, begun with his pedigree, and ended with his funeral.

If now and then they condescend to inform the world of particular facts, they are not always so happy as to select the most important. I know not well what advantage posterity can receive from the only circumstance by which Tickell has distinguished Addison from the rest of mankind, the irregularity of his pulse:<sup>9</sup> nor can I think myself overpaid for the time spent in reading the life of Malherbe, by being enabled to relate, after the learned biographer,<sup>1</sup> that Malherbe had two predominant opinions; one, that the looseness of a single woman might destroy all her boast of ancient descent; the other, that the French beggars made use very improperly and barbarously of the phrase *noble gentleman*, because either word included the sense of both.

There are, indeed, some natural reasons why these narratives are often written by such as were not likely to give much instruction or delight, and why most accounts of particular persons are barren and useless. If a life be delayed till interest and envy are at an end, we may hope for impartiality, but must expect little intelligence;<sup>2</sup> for the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory, and are rarely transmitted by tradition. We know how few can portray a living acquaintance, except by his most prominent and observable



particularities, and the grosser features of his mind; and it may be easily imagined how much of this little knowledge may be lost in imparting it, and how soon a succession of copies will lose all resemblance of the original.

If the biographer writes from personal knowledge, and makes haste to gratify the public curiosity, there is danger lest his interest, his fear, his gratitude, or his tenderness, overpower his fidelity, and tempt him to conceal, if not to invent. There are many who think it an act of piety to hide the faults or failings of their friends, even when they can no longer suffer by their detection; we therefore see whole ranks of characters adorned with uniform panegyric, and not to be known from one another, but by extrinsic and casual circumstances. "Let me remember," says Hale, "when I find myself inclined to pity a criminal, that there is likewise a pity due to the country." <sup>3</sup> If we owe regard to the memory of the dead, there is yet more respect to be paid to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Brings it near.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Join.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pliny the Younger's *Epistles* 3.1. Johnson translates the phrase in the preceding clause.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Always.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Jacques-Auguste de Thou (1553–1617), an important French historian, of whom Nicholas Rigault wrote a brief biography, a sentence of which Johnson quotes and translates below.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sallust, a Roman historian of the 1st century B.C.E., wrote an account of Catiline's conspiracy against the Roman state. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Camerarius wrote a life of Melancthon, a German theologian of the 16th century.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sir William Temple, characterizing the Dutch statesman John De Witt.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: From Thomas Tickell's preface to Addison's *Works* (1721).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The life of the French poet François de Malherbe (1555–1628) was written by Honorat de Racan.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Information.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: From Gilbert Burnet's *Life and Death of Sir Matthew Hale* (1682).[Return to reference 3](#)

**Rasselas** Johnson wrote *Rasselas* in January 1759 during the evenings of one week, a remarkable instance of his ability to write rapidly and brilliantly under the pressure of necessity. His mother lay dying in Lichfield. Her son, famous for his *Dictionary*, was nonetheless in great need of money with which to make her last days comfortable, pay her funeral expenses, and settle her small debts. He was paid £100 for the first edition of *Rasselas*, but not in time to attend her deathbed or her funeral.

*Rasselas* is a philosophical fable cast in the popular form of an Oriental tale, a type of fiction that owed its popularity to the vogue of the *Arabian Nights*, first translated into English in the early eighteenth century (see [p. 297](#)). Because the work is a fable, we should not approach it as a novel: psychologically credible characters and a series of intricately involved actions that lead to a necessary resolution and conclusion are not to be found in *Rasselas*. Instead we are meant to reflect on the ideas and to savor the melancholy resonance and intelligence of the stately prose that expresses them. Johnson arranges the incidents of the fable to test a variety of possible solutions to a problem: What choice of life will bring us happiness? (*The Choice of Life* was his working title for the book.) Many ways of life are examined in turn, and each is found wanting. Johnson does not pretend to have solved the problem. Rather, he locates the sources of discontent in a basic principle of human nature: the “hunger of imagination which preys incessantly upon life” ([Chapter 32](#)) and which lures us to “listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope” ([Chapter 1](#)). The tale is a gentle satire on one of the perennial topics of satirists: the folly of all of us who stubbornly cling to our illusions despite the evidence of experience. *Rasselas* is not all darkness and gloom, for Johnson’s theme invites comic as well as tragic treatment, and some of the episodes evoke that laughter of the mind that is the effect of high comedy. In its main theme, however—the folly of cherishing the dream of ever attaining unalloyed happiness in a world that can never wholly satisfy our desires—and in many of the

sayings of its characters, especially of the sage Imlac, *Rasselas* expresses some of Johnson's own deepest convictions.

# **The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia**

## **Chapter 1. Description of a Palace in a Valley**

Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow—attend to the history of Rasselas, prince of Abyssinia.

Rasselas was the fourth son of the mighty emperor in whose dominions the Father of Waters<sup>1</sup> begins his course; whose bounty pours down the streams of plenty, and scatters over half the world the harvests of Egypt.

According to the custom which has descended from age to age among the monarchs of the torrid zone, Rasselas was confined in a private palace, with the other sons and daughters of Abyssinian royalty, till the order of succession should call him to the throne.

The place which the wisdom or policy of antiquity had destined for the residence of the Abyssinian princes was a spacious valley<sup>2</sup> in the kingdom of Amhara, surrounded on every side by mountains, of which the summits overhang the middle part. The only passage by which it could be entered was a cavern that passed under a rock, of which it has long been disputed whether it was the work of nature or of human industry. The outlet of the cavern was concealed by a thick wood, and the mouth which opened into the valley was closed with gates of iron, forged by the artificers of ancient days, so massy that no man could, without the help of engines, open or shut them.

From the mountains on every side rivulets descended that filled all the valley with verdure and fertility, and formed a lake in the middle, inhabited by fish of every species, and frequented by every fowl whom nature has taught to dip the wing in water. This lake discharged its superfluities by a stream, which entered a dark cleft of the mountain on the northern side, and fell with dreadful noise from precipice to precipice till it was heard no more.

The sides of the mountains were covered with trees, the banks of the brooks were diversified with flowers; every blast<sup>3</sup> shook spices

from the rocks, and every month dropped fruits upon the ground. All animals that bite the grass, or browse the shrub, whether wild or tame, wandered in this extensive circuit, secured from beasts of prey by the mountains which confined them. On one part were flocks and herds feeding in the pastures, on another all the beasts of chase frisking in the lawns; the sprightly kid was bounding on the rocks, the subtle monkey frolicking in the trees, and the solemn elephant reposing in the shade. All the diversities of the world were brought together, the blessings of nature were collected, and its evils extracted and excluded.

The valley, wide and fruitful, supplied its inhabitants with the necessities of life, and all delights and superfluities were added at the annual visit which the emperor paid his children, when the iron gate was opened to the sound of music, and during eight days everyone that resided in the valley was required to propose whatever might contribute to make seclusion pleasant, to fill up the vacancies of attention, and lessen the tediousness of time. Every desire was immediately granted. All the artificers of pleasure were called to gladden the festivity; the musicians exerted the power of harmony, and the dancers showed their activity before the princes, in hope that they should pass their lives in this blissful captivity, to which those only were admitted whose performance was thought able to add novelty to luxury. Such was the appearance of security and delight which this retirement afforded, that they to whom it was new always desired that it might be perpetual; and as those on whom the iron gate had once closed were never suffered to return, the effect of longer experience could not be known. Thus every year produced new schemes of delight and new competitors for imprisonment.

The palace stood on an eminence, raised about thirty paces<sup>4</sup> above the surface of the lake. It was divided into many squares or courts, built with greater or less magnificence according to the rank of those for whom they were designed. The roofs were turned into arches of massy stone, joined with a cement that grew harder by

time, and the building stood from century to century, deriding the solstitial rains and equinoctial hurricanes, without need of reparation.

This house, which was so large as to be fully known to none but some ancient officers, who successively inherited the secrets of the place, was built as if suspicion herself had dictated the plan. To every room there was an open and secret passage; every square had a communication with the rest, either from the upper stories by private galleries, or by subterranean passages from the lower apartments. Many of the columns had unsuspected cavities, in which a long race of monarchs had repositied their treasures. They then closed up the opening with marble, which was never to be removed but in the utmost exigencies of the kingdom, and recorded their accumulations in a book, which was itself concealed in a tower, not entered but by the emperor, attended by the prince who stood next in succession.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The Nile.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Johnson had read of the Happy Valley in the Portuguese Jesuit Father Lobo's book on Abyssinia, which he translated in 1735. This description also owes something to the description of the Garden in *Paradise Lost* 4, and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" may owe something to it.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "A gust or puff of wind" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: About 150 feet.[Return to reference 4](#)



## **Chapter 2. *The Discontent of Rasselas in the Happy Valley***

Here the sons and daughters of Abyssinia lived only to know the soft vicissitudes of pleasure and repose, attended by all that were skillful to delight, and gratified with whatever the senses can enjoy. They wandered in gardens of fragrance, and slept in the fortresses of security. Every art was practiced to make them pleased with their own condition. The sages who instructed them told them of nothing but the miseries of public life, and described all beyond the mountains as regions of calamity, where discord was always raging, and where man preyed upon man.

To heighten their opinion of their own felicity, they were daily entertained with songs, the subject of which was the *happy valley*. Their appetites were excited by frequent enumerations of different enjoyments, and revelry and merriment was the business of every hour, from the dawn of morning to the close of even.

These methods were generally successful; few of the princes had ever wished to enlarge their bounds, but passed their lives in full conviction that they had all within their reach that art or nature could bestow, and pitied those whom fate had excluded from this seat of tranquility, as the sport of chance and the slaves of misery.

Thus they rose in the morning and lay down at night, pleased with each other and with themselves; all but Rasselas, who, in the twenty-sixth year of his age, began to withdraw himself from their pastimes and assemblies, and to delight in solitary walks and silent meditation. He often sat before tables covered with luxury, and forgot to taste the dainties that were placed before him; he rose abruptly in the midst of the song, and hastily retired beyond the sound of music. His attendants observed the change, and endeavored to renew his love of pleasure. He neglected their officiousness, repulsed their invitations, and spent day after day on the banks of rivulets sheltered with trees, where he sometimes listened to the birds in the branches, sometimes observed the fish playing in the stream, and anon cast his eyes upon the pastures and

mountains filled with animals, of which some were biting the herbage, and some sleeping among the bushes.

This singularity of his humor made him much observed. One of the sages, in whose conversation he had formerly delighted, followed him secretly, in hope of discovering the cause of his disquiet. Rasselas, who knew not that anyone was near him, having for some time fixed his eyes upon the goats that were browsing among the rocks, began to compare their condition with his own.

"What," said he, "makes the difference between man and all the rest of the animal creation? Every beast that strays beside me has the same corporal necessities with myself; he is hungry, and crops the grass, he is thirsty, and drinks the stream, his thirst and hunger are appeased, he is satisfied, and sleeps; he rises again, and he is hungry, he is again fed, and is at rest. I am hungry and thirsty like him, but when thirst and hunger cease, I am not at rest; I am, like him, pained with want, but am not, like him, satisfied with fullness. The intermediate hours are tedious and gloomy; I long again to be hungry that I may again quicken my attention. The birds peck the berries or the corn, and fly away to the groves, where they sit in seeming happiness on the branches, and waste their lives in tuning one unvaried series of sounds. I likewise can call the lutanist and the singer, but the sounds that pleased me yesterday weary me today, and will grow yet more wearisome tomorrow. I can discover within me no power of perception which is not glutted with its proper pleasure, yet I do not feel myself delighted. Man has surely some latent sense for which this place affords no gratification, or he has some desires distinct from sense, which must be satisfied before he can be happy."

After this he lifted up his head, and seeing the moon rising, walked towards the palace. As he passed through the fields, and saw the animals around him, "Ye," said he, "are happy, and need not envy me that walk thus among you, burthened with myself; nor do I, ye gentle beings, envy your felicity, for it is not the felicity of man. I have many distresses from which ye are free; I fear pain when I do not feel it; I sometimes shrink at evils recollected, and sometimes

start at evils anticipated. Surely the equity of Providence has balanced peculiar sufferings with peculiar enjoyments.”

With observations like these the prince amused himself as he returned, uttering them with a plaintive voice, yet with a look that discovered<sup>5</sup> him to feel some complacency in his own perspicacity, and to receive some solace of the miseries of life from consciousness of the delicacy with which he felt, and the eloquence with which he bewailed them. He mingled cheerfully in the diversions of the evening, and all rejoiced to find that his heart was lightened.

## Endnotes

- Note 5: Showed. [Return to reference 5](#)

### **Chapter 3. The Wants of Him That Wants Nothing**

On the next day his old instructor, imagining that he had now made himself acquainted with his disease of mind, was in the hope of curing it by counsel, and officiously sought an opportunity of conference, which the prince, having long considered him as one whose intellects were exhausted, was not very willing to afford. "Why," said he, "does this man thus intrude upon me; shall I be never suffered to forget those lectures which pleased only while they were new, and to become new again must be forgotten?" He then walked into the wood, and composed himself to his usual meditations; when, before his thoughts had taken any settled form, he perceived his pursuer at his side, and was at first prompted by his impatience to go hastily away; but, being unwilling to offend a man whom he had once revered and still loved, he invited him to sit down with him on the bank.

The old man, thus encouraged, began to lament the change which had been lately observed in the prince, and to inquire why he so often retired from the pleasures of the palace, to loneliness and silence. "I fly from pleasure," said the prince, "because pleasure has ceased to please; I am lonely because I am miserable, and am unwilling to cloud with my presence the happiness of others." "You, sir," said the sage, "are the first who has complained of misery in the *happy valley*. I hope to convince you that your complaints have no real cause. You are here in full possession of all that the emperor of Abyssinia can bestow; here is neither labor to be endured nor danger to be dreaded, yet here is all that labor or danger can procure or purchase. Look round and tell me which of your wants is without supply; if you want nothing, how are you unhappy?"

"That I want nothing," said the prince, "or that I know not what I want, is the cause of my complaint; if I had any known want, I should have a certain wish; that wish would excite endeavor, and I should not then repine to see the sun move so slowly towards the western mountain, or lament when the day breaks, and sleep will no longer hide me from myself. When I see the kids and the lambs

chasing one another, I fancy that I should be happy if I had something to pursue. But, possessing all that I can want, I find one day and one hour exactly like another, except that the latter is still more tedious than the former. Let your experience inform me how the day may now seem as short as in my childhood, while nature was yet fresh and every moment showed me what I never had observed before. I have already enjoyed too much; give me something to desire."

The old man was surprised at this new species of affliction and knew not what to reply, yet was unwilling to be silent. "Sir," said he, "if you had seen the miseries of the world you would know how to value your present state." "Now," said the prince, "you have given me something to desire. I shall long to see the miseries of the world, since the sight of them is necessary to happiness."

#### **Chapter 4. The Prince Continues to Grieve and Muse**

At this time the sound of music proclaimed the hour of repast, and the conversation was concluded. The old man went away sufficiently discontented to find that his reasonings had produced the only conclusion which they were intended to prevent. But in the decline of life shame and grief are of short duration; whether it be that we bear easily what we have born long, or that, finding ourselves in age less regarded, we less regard others; or, that we look with slight regard upon afflictions, to which we know that the hand of death is about to put an end.

The prince, whose views were extended to a wider space, could not speedily quiet his emotions. He had been before terrified at the length of life which nature promised him, because he considered that in a long time much must be endured; he now rejoiced in his youth, because in many years much might be done.

This first beam of hope, that had been ever darted into his mind, rekindled youth in his cheeks, and doubled the luster of his eyes. He was fired with the desire of doing something, though he knew not yet with distinctness, either end or means.

He was now no longer gloomy and unsocial; but, considering himself as master of a secret stock of happiness, which he could enjoy only by concealing it, he affected to be busy in all schemes of diversion, and endeavored to make others pleased with the state of which he himself was weary. But pleasures never can be so multiplied or continued, as not to leave much of life unemployed; there were many hours, both of the night and day, which he could spend without suspicion in solitary thought. The load of life was much lightened: he went eagerly into the assemblies, because he supposed the frequency of his presence necessary to the success of his purposes; he retired gladly to privacy, because he had now a subject of thought.

His chief amusement was to picture to himself that world which he had never seen; to place himself in various conditions; to be entangled in imaginary difficulties, and to be engaged in wild

adventures: but his benevolence always terminated his projects in the relief of distress, the detection of fraud, the defeat of oppression, and the diffusion of happiness.

Thus passed twenty months of the life of Rasselas. He busied himself so intensely in visionary bustle, that he forgot his real solitude; and, amidst hourly preparations for the various incidents of human affairs, neglected to consider by what means he should mingle with mankind.

One day, as he was sitting on a bank, he feigned to himself an orphan virgin robbed of her little portion<sup>6</sup> by a treacherous lover, and crying after him for restitution and redress. So strongly was the image impressed upon his mind, that he started up in the maid's defense, and ran forward to seize the plunderer, with all the eagerness of real pursuit. Fear naturally quickens the flight of guilt. Rasselas could not catch the fugitive with his utmost efforts; but, resolving to weary, by perseverance, him whom he could not surpass in speed, he pressed on till the foot of the mountain stopped his course.

Here he recollected himself, and smiled at his own useless impetuosity. Then raising his eyes to the mountain, "This," said he, "is the fatal obstacle that hinders at once the enjoyment of pleasure, and the exercise of virtue. How long is it that my hopes and wishes have flown beyond this boundary of my life, which yet I never have attempted to surmount!"

Struck with this reflection, he sat down to muse, and remembered, that since he first resolved to escape from his confinement, the sun had passed twice over him in his annual course. He now felt a degree of regret with which he had never been before acquainted. He considered how much might have been done in the time which had passed, and left nothing real behind it. He compared twenty months with the life of man. "In life," said he, "is not to be counted the ignorance of infancy, or imbecility<sup>7</sup> of age. We are long before we are able to think, and we soon cease from the power of acting. The true period of human existence may be reasonably estimated as forty years, of which I have mused away

the four and twentieth part. What I have lost was certain, for I have certainly possessed it; but of twenty months to come who can assure me?"

The consciousness of his own folly pierced him deeply, and he was long before he could be reconciled to himself. "The rest of my time," said he, "has been lost by the crime or folly of my ancestors, and the absurd institutions of my country; I remember it with disgust, yet without remorse: but the months that have passed since new light darted into my soul, since I formed a scheme of reasonable felicity, have been squandered by my own fault. I have lost that which can never be restored: I have seen the sun rise and set for twenty months, an idle gazer on the light of heaven. In this time the birds have left the nest of their mother, and committed themselves to the woods and to the skies: the kid has forsaken the teat, and learned by degrees to climb the rocks in quest of independent sustenance. I only have made no advances, but am still helpless and ignorant. The moon, by more than twenty changes, admonished me of the flux of life; the stream that rolled before my feet upbraided my inactivity. I sat feasting on intellectual luxury, regardless alike of the examples of the earth, and the instructions of the planets. Twenty months are past, who shall restore them!"

These sorrowful meditations fastened upon his mind; he passed four months in resolving to lose no more time in idle resolves, and was awakened to more vigorous exertion by hearing a maid, who had broken a porcelain cup, remark that what cannot be repaired is not to be regretted.

This was obvious; and Rasselas reproached himself that he had not discovered it, having not known, or not considered, how many useful hints are obtained by chance, and how often the mind, hurried by her own ardor to distant views, neglects the truths that lie open before her. He, for a few hours, regretted his regret, and from that time bent his whole mind upon the means of escaping from the valley of happiness.

## **Endnotes**



- Note 6: Money or goods.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Weakness.[Return to reference 7](#)

## **Chapter 5. *The Prince Meditates His Escape***

He now found that it would be very difficult to effect that which it was very easy to suppose effected. When he looked round about him, he saw himself confined by the bars of nature which had never yet been broken, and by the gate, through which none that once had passed it were ever able to return. He was now impatient as an eagle in a grate.<sup>8</sup> He passed week after week in clambering the mountains, to see if there was any aperture which the bushes might conceal, but found all the summits inaccessible by their prominence. The iron gate he despaired to open; for it was not only secured with all the power of art, but was always watched by successive sentinels, and was by its position exposed to the perpetual observation of all the inhabitants.

He then examined the cavern through which the waters of the lake were discharged; and, looking down at a time when the sun shone strongly upon its mouth, he discovered it to be full of broken rocks, which, though they permitted the stream to flow through many narrow passages, would stop anybody of solid bulk. He returned discouraged and dejected; but, having now known the blessing of hope, resolved never to despair.

In these fruitless searches he spent ten months. The time, however, passed cheerfully away: in the morning he rose with new hope, in the evening applauded his own diligence, and in the night slept sound after his fatigue. He met a thousand amusements which beguiled his labor, and diversified his thoughts. He discerned the various instincts of animals, and properties of plants, and found the place replete with wonders, of which he purposed to solace himself with the contemplation, if he should never be able to accomplish his flight; rejoicing that his endeavors, though yet unsuccessful, had supplied him with a source of inexhaustible enquiry.

But his original curiosity was not yet abated; he resolved to obtain some knowledge of the ways of men. His wish still continued, but his hope grew less. He ceased to survey any longer the walls of his prison, and spared to search by new toils for interstices which he

knew could not be found, yet determined to keep his design always in view, and lay hold on any expedient that time should offer.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Barred cage. [Return to reference 8](#)

## **Chapter 6. A Dissertation on the Art of Flying**

Among the artists that had been allured into the happy valley, to labor for the accommodation and pleasure of its inhabitants, was a man eminent for his knowledge of the mechanic powers, who had contrived many engines<sup>9</sup> both of use and recreation. By a wheel, which the stream turned, he forced the water into a tower, whence it was distributed to all the apartments of the palace. He erected a pavillion in the garden, around which he kept the air always cool by artificial showers. One of the groves appropriated to the ladies, was ventilated by fans, to which the rivulet that run through it gave a constant motion; and instruments of soft music were placed at proper distances, of which some played by the impulse of the wind, and some by the power of the stream.

This artist was sometimes visited by Rasselas, who was pleased with every kind of knowledge, imagining that the time would come when all his acquisitions should be of use to him in the open world. He came one day to amuse himself in his usual manner, and found the master busy in building a sailing chariot: he saw that the design was practicable upon a level surface, and with expressions of great esteem solicited its completion. The workman was pleased to find himself so much regarded by the prince, and resolved to gain yet higher honors. "Sir," said he, "you have seen but a small part of what the mechanic sciences can perform. I have been long of opinion, that, instead of the tardy conveyance of ships and chariots, man might use the swifter migration of wings; that the fields of air are open to knowledge, and that only ignorance and idleness need crawl upon the ground."

This hint rekindled the prince's desire of passing the mountains; having seen what the mechanist had already performed, he was willing to fancy that he could do more; yet resolved to inquire further before he suffered hope to afflict him by disappointment. "I am afraid," said he to the artist, "that your imagination prevails over your skill, and that you now tell me rather what you wish than what you know. Every animal has his element assigned him; the birds have the

air, and man and beasts the earth." "So," replied the mechanist, "fishes have the water, in which yet beasts can swim by nature, and men by art. He that can swim needs not despair to fly: to swim is to fly in a grosser fluid, and to fly is to swim in a subtler.<sup>1</sup> We are only to proportion our power of resistance to the different density of the matter through which we are to pass. You will be necessarily upborn by the air, if you can renew any impulse upon it, faster than the air can recede from the pressure."



Unknown engraver, **Rasselas**, 1787. Rasselas pulls the artist to shore. *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia, a tale, in two volumes.*

---

"But the exercise of swimming," said the prince, "is very laborious; the strongest limbs are soon wearied; I am afraid the act of flying will be yet more violent, and wings will be of no great use, unless we can fly further than we can swim."

"The labor of rising from the ground," said the artist, "will be great, as we see it in the heavier domestic fowls; but, as we mount higher, the earth's attraction, and the body's gravity, will be gradually diminished, till we shall arrive at a region where the man will float in the air without any tendency to fall: no care will then be necessary, but to move forwards, which the gentlest impulse will effect. You, Sir, whose curiosity is so extensive, will easily conceive with what pleasure a philosopher, furnished with wings, and hovering in the sky, would see the earth, and all its inhabitants, rolling beneath him, and presenting to him successively, by its diurnal motion, all the countries within the same parallel. How must it amuse the pendent spectator to see the moving scene of land and ocean, cities and deserts! To survey with equal security the marts of trade, and the fields of battle; mountains infested by barbarians, and fruitful regions gladdened by plenty, and lulled by peace! How easily shall we then trace the Nile through all his passage; pass over to distant regions, and examine the face of nature from one extremity of the earth to the other!"

"All this," said the prince, "is much to be desired, but I am afraid that no man will be able to breathe in these regions of speculation and tranquility. I have been told, that respiration is difficult upon lofty mountains, yet from these precipices, though so high as to produce great tenuity of the air, it is very easy to fall: therefore I suspect, that from any height, where life can be supported, there may be danger of too quick descent."

"Nothing," replied the artist, "will ever be attempted, if all possible objections must be first overcome. If you will favor my

project I will try the first flight at my own hazard. I have considered the structure of all volant<sup>2</sup> animals, and find the folding continuity of the bat's wings most easily accommodated to the human form. Upon this model I shall begin my task tomorrow, and in a year expect to tower into the air beyond the malice or pursuit of man. But I will work only on this condition, that the art shall not be divulged, and that you shall not require me to make wings for any but ourselves."

"Why," said Rasselas, "should you envy others so great an advantage? All skill ought to be exerted for universal good; every man has owed much to others, and ought to repay the kindness that he has received."

"If men were all virtuous," returned the artist, "I should with great alacrity teach them all to fly. But what would be the security of the good, if the bad could at pleasure invade them from the sky? Against an army sailing through the clouds neither walls, nor mountains, nor seas, could afford any security. A flight of northern savages might hover in the wind, and light at once with irresistible violence upon the capital of a fruitful region that was rolling under them. Even this valley, the retreat of princes, the abode of happiness, might be violated by the sudden descent of some of the naked nations that swarm on the coast of the southern sea."

The prince promised secrecy, and waited for the performance, not wholly hopeless of success. He visited the work from time to time, observed its progress, and remarked many ingenious contrivances to facilitate motion, and unite levity with strength. The artist was every day more certain that he should leave vultures and eagles behind him, and the contagion of his confidence seized upon the prince.

In a year the wings were finished, and, on a morning appointed, the maker appeared furnished for flight on a little promontory: he waved his pinions a while to gather air, then leaped from his stand, and in an instant dropped into the lake. His wings, which were of no use in the air, sustained him in the water, and the prince drew him to land, half dead with terror and vexation.

## Endnotes



- Note 9: Machines. “Mechanic powers”: the forces that cause things to move.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Thinner.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Able to fly.[Return to reference 2](#)

## **Chapter 7. The Prince Finds a Man of Learning**

The prince was not much afflicted by this disaster, having suffered himself to hope for a happier event, only because he had no other means of escape in view. He still persisted in his design to leave the happy valley by the first opportunity.

His imagination was now at a stand; he had no prospect of entering into the world; and, notwithstanding all his endeavors to support himself, discontent by degrees preyed upon him, and he began again to lose his thoughts in sadness, when the rainy season, which in these countries is periodical, made it inconvenient to wander in the woods.

The rain continued longer and with more violence than had been ever known; the clouds broke on the surrounding mountains, and the torrents streamed into the plain on every side, till the cavern was too narrow to discharge the water. The lake overflowed its banks, and all the level of the valley was covered with the inundation. The eminence, on which the palace was built, and some other spots of rising ground, were all that the eye could now discover. The herds and flocks left the pastures, and both the wild beasts and the tame retreated to the mountains.

This inundation confined all the princes to domestic amusements, and the attention of Rasselas was particularly seized by a poem, which Imlac rehearsed,<sup>3</sup> upon the various conditions of humanity. He commanded the poet to attend him in his apartment, and recite his verses a second time; then entering into familiar talk, he thought himself happy in having found a man who knew the world so well, and could so skillfully paint the scenes of life. He asked a thousand questions about things, to which, though common to all other mortals, his confinement from childhood had kept him a stranger. The poet pitied his ignorance, and loved his curiosity, and entertained him from day to day with novelty and instruction, so that the prince regretted the necessity of sleep, and longed till the morning should renew his pleasure.

As they were sitting together, the prince commanded Imlac to relate his history, and to tell by what accident he was forced, or by what motive induced, to close his life in the happy valley. As he was going to begin his narrative, Rasselas was called to a concert, and obliged to restrain his curiosity till the evening.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Recited. [Return to reference 3](#)

## **Chapter 8. The History of Imlac**

The close of the day is, in the regions of the torrid zone, the only season of diversion and entertainment, and it was therefore midnight before the music ceased, and the princesses retired. Rasselas then called for his companion and required him to begin the story of his life.

"Sir," said Imlac, "my history will not be long: the life that is devoted to knowledge passes silently away, and is very little diversified by events. To talk in public, to think in solitude, to read and to hear, to inquire, and answer inquiries, is the business of a scholar. He wanders about the world without pomp or terror, and is neither known nor valued but by men like himself.

"I was born in the kingdom of Goiama,<sup>4</sup> at no great distance from the fountain of the Nile. My father was a wealthy merchant, who traded between the inland countries of Africk and the ports of the Red Sea. He was honest, frugal and diligent, but of mean sentiments, and narrow comprehension: he desired only to be rich, and to conceal his riches, lest he should be spoiled<sup>5</sup> by the governors of the province."

"Surely," said the prince, "my father must be negligent of his charge, if any man in his dominions dares take that which belongs to another. Does he not know that kings are accountable for injustice permitted as well as done? If I were emperor, not the meanest of my subjects should be oppressed with impunity. My blood boils when I am told that a merchant durst not enjoy his honest gains for fear of losing them by the rapacity of power. Name the governor who robbed the people, that I may declare his crimes to the emperor."

"Sir," said Imlac, "your ardor is the natural effect of virtue animated by youth: the time will come when you will acquit your father, and perhaps hear with less impatience of the governor. Oppression is, in the Abyssinian dominions, neither frequent nor tolerated; but no form of government has been yet discovered, by which cruelty can be wholly prevented. Subordination supposes power on one part and subjection on the other; and if power be in

the hands of men, it will sometimes be abused. The vigilance of the supreme magistrate may do much, but much will still remain undone. He can never know all the crimes that are committed, and can seldom punish all that he knows."

"This," said the prince, "I do not understand, but I had rather hear thee than dispute. Continue thy narration."

"My father," proceeded Imlac, "originally intended that I should have no other education, than such as might qualify me for commerce; and discovering in me great strength of memory, and quickness of apprehension, often declared his hope that I should be some time the richest man in Abyssinia."

"Why," said the prince, "did thy father desire the increase of his wealth, when it was already greater than he durst discover or enjoy? I am unwilling to doubt thy veracity, yet inconsistencies cannot both be true."

"Inconsistencies," answered Imlac, "cannot both be right, but, imputed to man, they may both be true. Yet diversity is not inconsistency. My father might expect a time of greater security. However, some desire is necessary to keep life in motion, and he, whose real wants are supplied, must admit those of fancy."

"This," said the prince, "I can in some measure conceive. I repent that I interrupted thee."

"With this hope," proceeded Imlac, "he sent me to school; but when I had once found the delight of knowledge, and felt the pleasure of intelligence<sup>6</sup> and the pride of invention, I began silently to despise riches, and determined to disappoint the purpose of my father, whose grossness of conception raised my pity. I was twenty years old before his tenderness would expose me to the fatigue of travel, in which time I had been instructed, by successive masters, in all the literature of my native country. As every hour taught me something new, I lived in a continual course of gratifications; but, as I advanced towards manhood, I lost much of the reverence with which I had been used to look on my instructors; because, when the lesson was ended, I did not find them wiser or better than common men.

"At length my father resolved to initiate me in commerce, and, opening one of his subterranean treasures, counted out ten thousand pieces of gold. 'This, young man,' said he, 'is the stock with which you must negotiate.'<sup>7</sup> I began with less than the fifth part, and you see how diligence and parsimony have increased it. This is your own to waste or to improve. If you squander it by negligence or caprice, you must wait for my death before you will be rich: if, in four years, you double your stock, we will thenceforward let subordination cease, and live together as friends and partners; for he shall always be equal with me, who is equally skilled in the art of growing rich.'

"We laid our money upon camels, concealed in bales of cheap goods, and travelled to the shore of the Red Sea. When I cast my eye on the expanse of waters my heart bounded like that of a prisoner escaped. I felt an unextinguishable curiosity kindle in my mind, and resolved to snatch this opportunity of seeing the manners of other nations, and of learning sciences unknown in Abyssinia.

"I remembered that my father had obliged me to the improvement of my stock, not by a promise which I ought not to violate, but by a penalty which I was at liberty to incur; and therefore determined to gratify my predominant desire, and by drinking at the fountains of knowledge, to quench the thirst of curiosity.

"As I was supposed to trade without connection with my father, it was easy for me to become acquainted with the master of a ship, and procure a passage to some other country. I had no motives of choice to regulate my voyage; it was sufficient for me that, wherever I wandered, I should see a country which I had not seen before. I therefore entered a ship bound for Surat,<sup>8</sup> having left a letter for my father declaring my intention.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Mentioned by Father Lobo, in the western part of Abyssinian dominions. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Robbed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Information or knowledge.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Do business.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A port in India.[Return to reference 8](#)

## **Chapter 9. The History of Imlac Continued**

"When I first entered upon the world of waters, and lost sight of land, I looked round about me with pleasing terror, and thinking my soul enlarged by the boundless prospect, imagined that I could gaze round for ever without satiety; but, in a short time, I grew weary of looking on barren uniformity, where I could only see again what I had already seen. I then descended into the ship, and doubted for a while whether all my future pleasures would not end like this in disgust and disappointment. Yet, surely, said I, the ocean and the land are very different; the only variety of water is rest and motion, but the earth has mountains and valleys, deserts and cities: it is inhabited by men of different customs and contrary opinions; and I may hope to find variety in life, though I should miss it in nature.

"With this thought I quieted my mind; and amused myself during the voyage, sometimes by learning from the sailors the art of navigation, which I have never practiced, and sometimes by forming schemes for my conduct in different situations, in not one of which I have been ever placed.

"I was almost weary of my naval amusements when we landed safely at Surat. I secured my money, and purchasing some commodities for show, joined myself to a caravan that was passing into the inland country. My companions, for some reason or other, conjecturing that I was rich, and, by my inquiries and admiration, finding that I was ignorant, considered me as a novice whom they had a right to cheat, and who was to learn at the usual expense the art of fraud. They exposed me to the theft of servants, and the exaction of officers,<sup>9</sup> and saw me plundered upon false pretences, without any advantage to themselves, but that of rejoicing in the superiority of their own knowledge."

"Stop a moment," said the prince. "Is there such depravity in man, as that he should injure another without benefit to himself? I can easily conceive that all are pleased with superiority; but your ignorance was merely accidental, which, being neither your crime nor your folly, could afford them no reason to applaud themselves;



and the knowledge which they had, and which you wanted, they might as effectually have shown by warning, as betraying you."

"Pride," said Imlac, "is seldom delicate, it will please itself with very mean advantages; and envy feels not its own happiness, but when it may be compared with the misery of others. They were my enemies because they grieved to think me rich, and my oppressors because they delighted to find me weak."

"Proceed," said the prince: "I doubt not of the facts which you relate, but imagine that you impute them to mistaken motives."

"In this company," said Imlac, "I arrived at Agra, the capital of Indostan, the city in which the great Mogul commonly resides. I applied myself to the language of the country, and in a few months was able to converse with the learned men; some of whom I found morose and reserved, and others easy and communicative; some were unwilling to teach another what they had with difficulty learned themselves; and some showed that the end<sup>1</sup> of their studies was to gain the dignity of instructing.

"To the tutor of the young princes I recommended myself so much, that I was presented to the emperor as a man of uncommon knowledge. The emperor asked me many questions concerning my country and my travels; and though I cannot now recollect any thing that he uttered above the power of a common man, he dismissed me astonished at his wisdom, and enamored of his goodness.

"My credit was now so high, that the merchants, with whom I had traveled, applied to me for recommendations to the ladies of the court. I was surprised at their confidence of solicitation, and gently reproached them with their practices on the road. They heard me with cold indifference, and showed no tokens of shame or sorrow.

"They then urged their request with the offer of a bribe; but what I would not do for kindness I would not do for money; and refused them, not because they had injured me, but because I would not enable them to injure others; for I knew they would have made use of my credit to cheat those who should buy their wares.

"Having resided at Agra till there was no more to be learned, I traveled into Persia, where I saw many remains of ancient

magnificence, and observed many new accommodations<sup>2</sup> of life. The Persians are a nation eminently social, and their assemblies afforded me daily opportunities of remarking characters and manners, and of tracing human nature through all its variations.

“From Persia I passed into Arabia, where I saw a nation at once pastoral and warlike; who live without any settled habitation; whose only wealth is their flocks and herds; and who have yet carried on, through all ages, an hereditary war with all mankind, though they neither covet nor envy their possessions.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Officials or agents.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Purpose.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “Conveniences, things requisite to ease or refreshment” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 2](#)

## **Chapter 10. *Imlac's History Continued. A Dissertation upon Poetry***

"Wherever I went, I found that poetry was considered as the highest learning, and regarded with a veneration somewhat approaching to that which man would pay to the angelic nature. And yet it fills me with wonder that, in almost all countries, the most ancient poets are considered as the best: whether it be that every other kind of knowledge is an acquisition gradually attained, and poetry is a gift conferred at once; or that the first poetry of every nation surprised them as a novelty, and retained the credit by consent which it received by accident at first; or whether, as the province of poetry is to describe nature and passion, which are always the same, the first writers took possession of the most striking objects for description and the most probable occurrences for fiction, and left nothing to those that followed them, but transcription of the same events, and new combinations of the same images—whatever be the reason, it is commonly observed that the early writers are in possession of nature, and their followers of art; that the first excel in strength and invention, and the latter in elegance and refinement.

"I was desirous to add my name to this illustrious fraternity. I read all the poets of Persia and Arabia, and was able to repeat by memory the volumes that are suspended in the mosque of Mecca.<sup>3</sup> But I soon found that no man was ever great by imitation. My desire of excellence impelled me to transfer my attention to nature and to life. Nature was to be my subject, and men to be my auditors: I could never describe what I had not seen; I could not hope to move those with delight or terror, whose interests and opinions I did not understand.

"Being now resolved to be a poet, I saw everything with a new purpose; my sphere of attention was suddenly magnified; no kind of knowledge was to be overlooked. I ranged mountains and deserts for images and resemblances, and pictured upon my mind every tree of the forest and flower of the valley. I observed with equal care the crags of the rock and the pinnacles of the palace. Sometimes I

wandered along the mazes of the rivulet, and sometimes watched the changes of the summer clouds. To a poet nothing can be useless. Whatever is beautiful, and whatever is dreadful, must be familiar to his imagination; he must be conversant with all that is awfully<sup>4</sup> vast or elegantly little. The plants of the garden, the animals of the wood, the minerals of the earth, and meteors of the sky, must all concur to store his mind with inexhaustible variety: for every idea<sup>5</sup> is useful for the enforcement or decoration of moral or religious truth; and he who knows most will have most power of diversifying his scenes, and of gratifying his reader with remote allusions and unexpected instruction.

"All the appearances of nature I was therefore careful to study, and every country which I have surveyed has contributed something to my poetical powers."

"In so wide a survey," said the prince, "you must surely have left much unobserved. I have lived till now within the circuit of these mountains, and yet cannot walk abroad without the sight of something which I have never beheld before, or never heeded."

"The business of a poet," said Imlac, "is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances; he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind, and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.

"But the knowledge of nature is only half the task of a poet; he must be acquainted likewise with all the modes of life. His character requires that he estimate the happiness and misery of every condition; observe the power of all the passions in all their combinations, and trace the changes of the human mind, as they are modified by various institutions and accidental influences of climate or custom, from the sprightliness of infancy to the despondence of decrepitude. He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or

country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental<sup>6</sup> truths, which will always be the same. He must, therefore, content himself with the slow progress of his name, condemn the applause of his own time, and commit his claims to the justice of posterity. He must write as the interpreter of nature and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations, as a being superior to time and place.

"His labor is not yet at an end; he must know many languages and many sciences; and, that his style may be worthy of his thoughts, must by incessant practice familiarize to himself every delicacy of speech and grace of harmony."

## Endnotes

- Note 3: In the 7th century, seven peerless Arabic poems were supposed to have been transcribed in gold and hung up in a mosque.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Awe-inspiringly.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mental image.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "General; pervading many particulars" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)

## **Chapter 11. Imlac's Narrative Continued. A Hint on Pilgrimage**

Imlac now felt the enthusiastic fit, and was proceeding to aggrandize his own profession, when the prince cried out: "Enough! thou hast convinced me that no human being can ever be a poet. Proceed with thy narration."

"To be a poet," said Imlac, "is indeed very difficult." "So difficult," returned the prince, "that I will at present hear no more of his labors. Tell me whither you went when you had seen Persia."

"From Persia," said the poet, "I traveled through Syria, and for three years resided in Palestine, where I conversed with great numbers of the northern and western nations of Europe, the nations which are now in possession of all power and all knowledge, whose armies are irresistible, and whose fleets command the remotest parts of the globe. When I compared these men with the natives of our own kingdom, and those that surround us, they appeared almost another order of beings. In their countries it is difficult to wish for anything that may not be obtained; a thousand arts, of which we never heard, are continually laboring for their convenience and pleasure; and whatever their own climate has denied them is supplied by their commerce."

"By what means," said the prince, "are the Europeans thus powerful, or why, since they can so easily visit Asia and Africa for trade or conquest, cannot the Asiatics and Africans invade their coasts, plant colonies in their ports, and give laws to their natural princes? The same wind that carries them back would bring us thither."

"They are more powerful, sir, than we," answered Imlac, "because they are wiser; knowledge will always predominate over ignorance, as man governs the other animals. But why their knowledge is more than ours, I know not what reason can be given, but the unsearchable will of the Supreme Being."

"When," said the prince with a sigh, "shall I be able to visit Palestine, and mingle with this mighty confluence of nations? Till

that happy moment shall arrive, let me fill up the time with such representations as thou canst give me. I am not ignorant of the motive that assembles such numbers in that place, and cannot but consider it as the center of wisdom and piety, to which the best and wisest men of every land must be continually resorting."

"There are some nations," said Imlac, "that send few visitants to Palestine; for many numerous and learned sects in Europe concur to censure pilgrimage as superstitious, or deride it as ridiculous."

"You know," said the prince, "how little my life has made me acquainted with diversity of opinions. It will be too long to hear the arguments on both sides; you, that have considered them, tell me the result."

"Pilgrimage," said Imlac, "like many other acts of piety, may be reasonable or superstitious, according to the principles upon which it is performed. Long journeys in search of truth are not commanded. Truth, such as is necessary to the regulation of life, is always found where it is honestly sought. Change of place is no natural cause of the increase of piety, for it inevitably produces dissipation of mind. Yet, since men go every day to view the fields where great actions have been performed, and return with stronger impressions of the event, curiosity of the same kind may naturally dispose us to view that country whence our religion had its beginning; and I believe no man surveys those awful scenes without some confirmation of holy resolutions. That the Supreme Being may be more easily propitiated in one place than in another is the dream of idle superstition, but that some places may operate upon our own minds in an uncommon manner is an opinion which hourly experience will justify. He who supposes that his vices may be more successfully combated in Palestine, will, perhaps, find himself mistaken, yet he may go thither without folly; he who thinks they will be more freely pardoned, dishonors at once his reason and religion."

"These," said the prince, "are European distinctions. I will consider them another time. What have you found to be the effect of knowledge? Are those nations happier than we?"

"There is so much infelicity," said the poet, "in the world that scarce any man has leisure from his own distresses to estimate the comparative happiness of others. Knowledge is certainly one of the means of pleasure, as is confessed by the natural desire which every mind feels of increasing its ideas. Ignorance is mere privation, by which nothing can be produced; it is a vacuity in which the soul sits motionless and torpid for want of attraction; and, without knowing why, we always rejoice when we learn, and grieve when we forget. I am therefore inclined to conclude that if nothing counteracts the natural consequence of learning, we grow more happy as our minds take a wider range.

"In enumerating the particular comforts of life, we shall find many advantages on the side of the Europeans. They cure wounds and diseases with which we languish and perish. We suffer inclemencies of weather which they can obviate. They have engines for the despatch of many laborious works, which we must perform by manual industry. There is such communication between distant places that one friend can hardly be said to be absent from another. Their policy removes all public inconveniences; they have roads cut through their mountains, and bridges laid upon their rivers. And, if we descend to the privacies of life, their habitations are more commodious, and their possessions are more secure."

"They are surely happy," said the prince, "who have all these conveniencies, of which I envy none so much as the facility with which separated friends interchange their thoughts."

"The Europeans," answered Imlac, "are less unhappy than we, but they are not happy. Human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed."



## **Chapter 12. The Story of Imlac Continued**

"I am not yet willing," said the prince, "to suppose that happiness is so parsimoniously distributed to mortals; nor can believe but that, if I had the choice of life, I should be able to fill every day with pleasure. I would injure no man, and should provoke no resentment: I would relieve every distress, and should enjoy the benedictions of gratitude. I would choose my friends among the wise, and my wife among the virtuous; and therefore should be in no danger from treachery, or unkindness. My children should, by my care, be learned and pious, and would repay to my age what their childhood had received. What would dare to molest him who might call on every side to thousands enriched by his bounty, or assisted by his power? And why should not life glide quietly away in the soft reciprocation of protection and reverence? All this may be done without the help of European refinements, which appear by their effects to be rather specious than useful. Let us leave them and pursue our journey."

"From Palestine," said Imlac, "I passed through many regions of Asia; in the more civilized kingdoms as a trader, and among the barbarians of the mountains as a pilgrim. At last I began to long for my native country, that I might repose after my travels, and fatigues, in the places where I had spent my earliest years, and gladden my old companions with the recital of my adventures. Often did I figure to myself those, with whom I had sported away the gay hours of dawning life, sitting round me in its evening, wondering at my tales, and listening to my counsels.

"When this thought had taken possession of my mind, I considered every moment as wasted which did not bring me nearer to Abyssinia. I hastened into Egypt, and, notwithstanding my impatience, was detained ten months in the contemplation of its ancient magnificence, and in enquiries after the remains of its ancient learning. I found in Cairo a mixture of all nations; some brought thither by the love of knowledge, some by the hope of gain, and many by the desire of living after their own manner without observation, and of lying hid in the obscurity of multitudes: for, in a

city, populous as Cairo, it is possible to obtain at the same time the gratifications of society, and the secrecy of solitude.

"From Cairo I traveled to Suez, and embarked on the Red Sea, passing along the coast till I arrived at the port from which I had departed twenty years before. Here I joined myself to a caravan and re-entered my native country.

"I now expected the caresses of my kinsmen, and the congratulations of my friends, and was not without hope that my father, whatever value he had set upon riches, would own with gladness and pride a son who was able to add to the felicity and honor of the nation. But I was soon convinced that my thoughts were vain. My father had been dead fourteen years, having divided his wealth among my brothers, who were removed to some other provinces. Of my companions the greater part was in the grave, of the rest some could with difficulty remember me, and some considered me as one corrupted by foreign manners.

"A man used to vicissitudes is not easily dejected. I forgot, after a time, my disappointment, and endeavored to recommend myself to the nobles of the kingdom: they admitted me to their tables, heard my story, and dismissed me. I opened a school, and was prohibited to teach. I then resolved to sit down in the quiet of domestic life, and addressed a lady that was fond of my conversation, but rejected my suit, because my father was a merchant.

"Wearied at last with solicitation and repulses, I resolved to hide myself for ever from the world, and depend no longer on the opinion or caprice of others. I waited for the time when the gate of the *happy valley* should open, that I might bid farewell to hope and fear: the day came; my performance was distinguished with favor, and I resigned myself with joy to perpetual confinement."

"Hast thou here found happiness at last?" said Rasselas. "Tell me without reserve; art thou content with thy condition? or, dost thou wish to be again wandering and inquiring? All the inhabitants of this valley celebrate their lot, and, at the annual visit of the emperor, invite others to partake of their felicity."

"Great prince," said Imlac, "I shall speak the truth: I know not one of all your attendants who does not lament the hour when he entered this retreat. I am less unhappy than the rest, because I have a mind replete with images, which I can vary and combine at pleasure. I can amuse my solitude by the renovation of the knowledge which begins to fade from my memory, and by recollection of the accidents of my past life. Yet all this ends in the sorrowful consideration, that my acquirements are now useless, and that none of my pleasures can be again enjoyed. The rest, whose minds have no impression but of the present moment, are either corroded by malignant passions, or sit stupid in the gloom of perpetual vacancy."

"What passions can infest those," said the prince, "who have no trials? We are in a place where impotence precludes malice, and where all envy is repressed by community<sup>2</sup> of enjoyments."

"There may be community," said Imlac, "of material possessions, but there can never be community of love or of esteem. It must happen that one will please more than another; he that knows himself despised will always be envious; and still more envious and malevolent, if he is condemned to live in the presence of those who despise him. The invitations, by which they allure others to a state which they feel to be wretched, proceed from the natural malignity of hopeless misery. They are weary of themselves, and of each other, and expect to find relief in new companions. They envy the liberty which their folly has forfeited, and would gladly see all mankind imprisoned like themselves.

"From this crime, however, I am wholly free. No man can say that he is wretched by my persuasion. I look with pity on the crowds who are annually soliciting admission to captivity, and wish that it were lawful for me to warn them of their danger."

"My dear Imlac," said the prince, "I will open to thee my whole heart. I have long meditated an escape from the happy valley. I have examined the mountains on every side, but find myself insuperably barred: teach me the way to break my prison; thou shalt

be the companion of my flight, the guide of my rambles, the partner of my fortune, and my sole director in the *choice of life*."

"Sir," answered the poet, "your escape will be difficult, and, perhaps, you may soon repent your curiosity. The world, which you figure to yourself smooth and quiet as the lake in the valley, you will find a sea foaming with tempests, and boiling with whirlpools: you will be sometimes overwhelmed by the waves of violence, and sometimes dashed against the rocks of treachery. Amidst wrongs and frauds, competitions and anxieties, you will wish a thousand times for these seats of quiet, and willingly quit hope to be free from fear."

"Do not seek to deter me from my purpose," said the prince: "I am impatient to see what thou hast seen; and, since thou art thyself weary of the valley, it is evident, that thy former state was better than this. Whatever be the consequence of my experiment, I am resolved to judge with my own eyes of the various conditions of men, and then to make deliberately my *choice of life*."

"I am afraid," said Imlac, "you are hindered by stronger restraints than my persuasions; yet, if your determination is fixed, I do not counsel you to despair. Few things are impossible to diligence and skill."

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Joint possession. [Return to reference 7](#)

### **Chapter 13. *Rasselas Discovers the Means of Escape***

The prince now dismissed his favorite to rest, but the narrative of wonders and novelties filled his mind with perturbation. He revolved all that he had heard, and prepared innumerable questions for the morning.

Much of his uneasiness was now removed. He had a friend to whom he could impart his thoughts, and whose experience could assist him in his designs. His heart was no longer condemned to swell with silent vexation. He thought that even the *happy valley* might be endured with such a companion, and that, if they could range the world together, he should have nothing further to desire.

In a few days the water was discharged, and the ground dried. The prince and Imlac then walked out together to converse without the notice of the rest. The prince, whose thoughts were always on the wing, as he passed by the gate, said, with a countenance of sorrow, "Why art thou so strong, and why is man so weak?"

"Man is not weak," answered his companion; "knowledge is more than equivalent to force. The master of mechanics laughs at strength. I can burst the gate, but cannot do it secretly. Some other expedient must be tried."

As they were walking on the side of the mountain, they observed that the conies,<sup>8</sup> which the rain had driven from their burrows, had taken shelter among the bushes, and formed holes behind them, tending upwards in an oblique line. "It has been the opinion of antiquity," said Imlac, "that human reason borrowed many arts from the instinct of animals; let us, therefore, not think ourselves degraded by learning from the coney. We may escape by piercing the mountain in the same direction. We will begin where the summit hangs over the middle part, and labor upward till we shall issue out beyond the prominence."

The eyes of the prince, when he heard this proposal, sparkled with joy. The execution was easy, and the success certain.

No time was now lost. They hastened early in the morning to choose a place proper for their mine. They clambered with great

fatigue among crags and brambles, and returned without having discovered any part that favored their design. The second and the third day were spent in the same manner, and with the same frustration. But, on the fourth, they found a small cavern, concealed by a thicket, where they resolved to make their experiment.

Imlac procured instruments proper to hew stone and remove earth, and they fell to their work on the next day with more eagerness than vigor. They were presently exhausted by their efforts, and sat down to pant upon the grass. The prince, for a moment, appeared to be discouraged. "Sir," said his companion, "practice will enable us to continue our labor for a longer time; mark, however, how far we have advanced, and you will find that our toil will some time have an end. Great works are performed, not by strength, but perseverance: yonder palace was raised by single stones, yet you see its height and spaciousness. He that shall walk with vigor three hours a day will pass in seven years a space equal to the circumference of the globe."

They returned to their work day after day, and, in a short time, found a fissure in the rock, which enabled them to pass far with very little obstruction. This Rasselas considered as a good omen. "Do not disturb your mind," said Imlac, "with other hopes or fears than reason may suggest: if you are pleased with prognostics of good, you will be terrified likewise with tokens of evil, and your whole life will be a prey to superstition. Whatever facilitates our work is more than an omen, it is a cause of success. This is one of those pleasing surprises which often happen to active resolution. Many things difficult to design prove easy to performance."

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Rabbits. [Return to reference 8](#)

#### **Chapter 14. Rasselas and Imlac Receive an Unexpected Visit**

They had now wrought their way to the middle, and solaced their toil with the approach of liberty, when the prince, coming down to refresh himself with air, found his sister Nekayah standing before the mouth of the cavity. He started and stood confused, afraid to tell his design, and yet hopeless to conceal it. A few moments determined him to repose on her fidelity, and secure her secrecy by a declaration without reserve.

“Do not imagine,” said the princess, “that I came hither as a spy: I had long observed from my window, that you and Imlac directed your walk every day towards the same point, but I did not suppose you had any better reason for the preference than a cooler shade, or more fragrant bank; nor followed you with any other design than to partake of your conversation. Since then not suspicion but fondness has detected you, let me not lose the advantage of my discovery. I am equally weary of confinement with yourself, and not less desirous of knowing what is done or suffered in the world. Permit me to fly with you from this tasteless tranquility, which will yet grow more loathsome when you have left me. You may deny me to accompany you, but cannot hinder me from following.”

The prince, who loved Nekayah above his other sisters, had no inclination to refuse her request, and grieved that he had lost an opportunity of showing his confidence by a voluntary communication. It was therefore agreed that she should leave the valley with them; and that, in the mean time, she should watch, lest any other straggler should, by chance or curiosity, follow them to the mountain.

At length their labor was at an end; they saw light beyond the prominence, and, issuing to the top of the mountain, beheld the Nile, yet a narrow current, wandering beneath them.

The prince looked round with rapture, anticipated all the pleasures of travel, and in thought was already transported beyond his father’s dominions. Imlac, though very joyful at his escape, had

less expectation of pleasure in the world, which he had before tried, and of which he had been weary.

Rasselas was so much delighted with a wider horizon, that he could not soon be persuaded to return into the valley. He informed his sister that the way was open, and that nothing now remained but to prepare for their departure.



## **Chapter 15. *The Prince and Princess Leave the Valley, and See Many Wonders***

The prince and princess had jewels sufficient to make them rich whenever they came into a place of commerce, which, by Imlac's direction, they hid in their clothes, and, on the night of the next full moon, all left the valley. The princess was followed only by a single favorite, who did not know whither she was going.

They clambered through the cavity, and began to go down on the other side. The princess and her maid turned their eyes towards every part, and, seeing nothing to bound their prospect, considered themselves as in danger of being lost in a dreary vacuity. They stopped and trembled. "I am almost afraid," said the princess, "to begin a journey of which I cannot perceive an end, and to venture into this immense plain where I may be approached on every side by men whom I never saw." The prince felt nearly the same emotions, though he thought it more manly to conceal them.

Imlac smiled at their terrors, and encouraged them to proceed; but the princess continued irresolute till she had been imperceptibly drawn forward too far to return.

In the morning they found some shepherds in the field, who set milk and fruits before them. The princess wondered that she did not see a palace ready for her reception, and a table spread with delicacies; but, being faint and hungry, she drank the milk and ate the fruits, and thought them of a higher flavor than the products of the valley.

They traveled forward by easy journeys, being all unaccustomed to toil or difficulty, and knowing, that though they might be missed, they could not be pursued. In a few days they came into a more populous region, where Imlac was diverted with the admiration which his companions expressed at the diversity of manners, stations and employments.

Their dress was such as might not bring upon them the suspicion of having any thing to conceal, yet the prince, wherever he came, expected to be obeyed, and the princess was frightened, because

those that came into her presence did not prostrate themselves before her. Imlac was forced to observe them with great vigilance, lest they should betray their rank by their unusual behavior, and detained them several weeks in the first village to accustom them to the sight of common mortals.

By degrees the royal wanderers were taught to understand that they had for a time laid aside their dignity, and were to expect only such regard as liberality and courtesy could procure. And Imlac, having, by many admonitions, prepared them to endure the tumults of a port, and the ruggedness of the commercial race, brought them down to the seacoast.

The prince and his sister, to whom every thing was new, were gratified equally at all places, and therefore remained for some months at the port without any inclination to pass further. Imlac was content with their stay, because he did not think it safe to expose them, unpracticed in the world, to the hazards of a foreign country.

At last he began to fear lest they should be discovered, and proposed to fix a day for their departure. They had no pretensions to judge for themselves, and referred the whole scheme to his direction. He therefore took passage in a ship to Suez; and, when the time came, with great difficulty prevailed on the princess to enter the vessel. They had a quick and prosperous voyage, and from Suez traveled by land to Cairo.

## **Chapter 16. They Enter Cairo, and Find Every Man Happy**

As they approached the city, which filled the strangers with astonishment, "This," said Imlac to the prince, "is the place where travelers and merchants assemble from all the corners of the earth. You will here find men of every character and every occupation. Commerce is here honorable. I will act as a merchant, and you shall live as strangers, who have no other end of travel than curiosity. It will soon be observed that we are rich; our reputation will procure us access to all whom we shall desire to know; you will see all the conditions of humanity, and enable yourself at leisure to make your *choice of life*."

They now entered the town, stunned by the noise, and offended by the crowds. Instruction had not yet so prevailed over habit, but that they wondered to see themselves pass undistinguished along the street, and met by the lowest of the people without reverence or notice. The princess could not at first bear the thought of being leveled with the vulgar,<sup>9</sup> and for some days continued in her chamber, where she was served by her favorite, Pekuah, as in the palace of the valley.

Imlac, who understood traffic,<sup>1</sup> sold part of the jewels the next day, and hired a house, which he adorned with such magnificence that he was immediately considered as a merchant of great wealth. His politeness attracted many acquaintance, and his generosity made him courted by many dependents. His table was crowded by men of every nation, who all admired his knowledge, and solicited his favor. His companions, not being able to mix in the conversation, could make no discovery<sup>2</sup> of their ignorance or surprise, and were gradually initiated in the world as they gained knowledge of the language.

The prince had, by frequent lectures, been, taught the use and nature of money; but the ladies could not for a long time comprehend what the merchants did with small pieces of gold and silver, or why things of so little use should be received as equivalent to the necessaries of life.

They studied the language two years, while Imlac was preparing to set before them the various ranks and conditions of mankind. He grew acquainted with all who had anything uncommon in their fortune or conduct. He frequented the voluptuous and the frugal, the idle and the busy, the merchants and the men of learning.

The prince being now able to converse with fluency, and having learned the caution necessary to be observed in his intercourse with strangers, began to accompany Imlac to places of resort, and to enter into all assemblies, that he might make his *choice of life*.

For some time he thought choice needless, because all appeared to him equally happy. Wherever he went he met gaiety and kindness, and heard the song of joy or the laugh of carelessness. He began to believe that the world overflowed with universal plenty, and that nothing was withheld either from want or merit; that every hand showered liberality, and every heart melted with benevolence: "And who then," says he, "will be suffered to be wretched?"

Imlac permitted the pleasing delusion, and was unwilling to crush the hope of inexperience, till one day, having sat awhile silent, "I know not," said the prince, "what can be the reason that I am more unhappy than any of our friends. I see them perpetually and unalterably cheerful, but feel my own mind restless and uneasy. I am unsatisfied with those pleasures which I seem most to court; I live in the crowds of jollity, not so much to enjoy company as to shun myself, and am only loud and merry to conceal my sadness."

"Every man," said Imlac, "may, by examining his own mind, guess what passes in the minds of others; when you feel that your own gaiety is counterfeit, it may justly lead you to suspect that of your companions not to be sincere. Envy is commonly reciprocal. We are long before we are convinced that happiness is never to be found, and each believes it possessed by others, to keep alive the hope of obtaining it for himself. In the assembly where you passed the last night, there appeared such sprightliness of air, and volatility of fancy, as might have suited beings of an higher order, formed to inhabit serener regions, inaccessible to care or sorrow; yet, believe

me, prince, there was not one who did not dread the moment when solitude should deliver him to the tyranny of reflection."

"This," said the prince, "may be true of others, since it is true of me; yet, whatever be the general infelicity of man, one condition is more happy than another, and wisdom surely directs us to take the least evil in the *choice of life*."

"The causes of good and evil," answered Imlac, "are so various and uncertain, so often entangled with each other, so diversified by various relations, and so much subject to accidents which cannot be foreseen, that he who would fix his condition upon incontestable reasons of preference must live and die inquiring and deliberating."

"But, surely," said Rasselas, "the wise men, to whom we listen with reverence and wonder, chose that mode of life for themselves which they thought most likely to make them happy."

"Very few," said the poet, "live by choice. Every man is placed in his present condition by causes which acted without his foresight, and with which he did not always willingly cooperate; and therefore you will rarely meet one who does not think the lot of his neighbor better than his own."

"I am pleased to think," said the prince, "that my birth has given me at least one advantage over others, by enabling me to determine for myself. I have here the world before me. I will review it at leisure; surely happiness is somewhere to be found."

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Ordinary people. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Commerce. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Exposure. [Return to reference 2](#)

## **Chapter 17. The Prince Associates with Young Men of Spirit and Gaiety**

Rasselas rose next day, and resolved to begin his experiments upon life. "Youth," cried he, "is the time of gladness: I will join myself to the young men, whose only business is to gratify their desires, and whose time is all spent in a succession of enjoyments."

To such societies he was readily admitted, but a few days brought him back weary and disgusted. Their mirth was without images,<sup>3</sup> their laughter without motive; their pleasures were gross and sensual, in which the mind had no part; their conduct was at once wild and mean; they laughed at order and at law, but the frown of power dejected, and the eye of wisdom abashed them.

The prince soon concluded, that he should never be happy in a course of life of which he was ashamed. He thought it unsuitable to a reasonable being to act without a plan, and to be sad or cheerful only by chance. "Happiness," said he, "must be something solid and permanent, without fear and without uncertainty."

But his young companions had gained so much of his regard by their frankness and courtesy, that he could not leave them without warning and remonstrance. "My friends," said he, "I have seriously considered our manners and our prospects, and find that we have mistaken our own interest. The first years of man must make provision for the last. He that never thinks never can be wise. Perpetual levity must end in ignorance; and intemperance, though it may fire the spirits for an hour, will make life short or miserable. Let us consider that youth is of no long duration, and that in maturer age, when the enchantments of fancy shall cease, and phantoms of delight dance no more about us, we shall have no comforts but the esteem of wise men, and the means of doing good. Let us, therefore, stop, while to stop is in our power: let us live as men who are sometime to grow old, and to whom it will be the most dreadful of all evils not to count their past years but by follies, and to be reminded of their former luxuriance of health only by the maladies which riot has produced."

They stared a while in silence one upon another, and, at last, drove him away by a general chorus of continued laughter.

The consciousness that his sentiments were just, and his intentions kind, was scarcely sufficient to support him against the horror of derision. But he recovered his tranquillity, and pursued his search.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Ideas. [Return to reference 3](#)

## **Chapter 18. *The Prince Finds a Wise and Happy Man***

As he was one day walking in the street, he saw a spacious building which all were, by the open doors, invited to enter: he followed the stream of people, and found it a hall or school of declamation, in which professors read lectures to their auditory.<sup>4</sup> He fixed his eye upon a sage raised above the rest, who discoursed with great energy on the government of the passions. His look was venerable, his action graceful, his pronunciation clear, and his diction elegant. He showed with great strength of sentiment and variety of illustration that human nature is degraded and debased, when the lower faculties predominate over the higher; that when fancy, the parent of passion, usurps the dominion of the mind, nothing ensues but the natural effect of unlawful government, perturbation, and confusion; that she betrays the fortresses of the intellect to rebels, and excites her children to sedition against reason, their lawful sovereign. He compared reason to the sun, of which the light is constant, uniform and lasting; and fancy to a meteor, of bright but transitory luster, irregular in its motion, and delusive in its direction.

He then communicated the various precepts given from time to time for the conquest of passion, and displayed the happiness of those who had obtained the important victory, after which man is no longer the slave of fear, nor the fool of hope; is no more emaciated by envy, inflamed by anger, emasculated by tenderness, or depressed by grief; but walks on calmly through the tumults or the privacies of life, as the sun pursues alike his course through the calm or the stormy sky.

He enumerated many examples of heroes immovable by pain or pleasure, who looked with indifference on those modes or accidents to which the vulgar give the names of good and evil. He exhorted his hearers to lay aside their prejudices, and arm themselves against the shafts of malice or misfortune, by invulnerable patience; concluding that this state only was happiness, and that this happiness was in everyone's power.



Rasselas listened to him with the veneration due to the instructions of a superior being, and, waiting for him at the door, humbly implored the liberty of visiting so great a master of true wisdom. The lecturer hesitated a moment, when Rasselas put a purse of gold into his hand, which he received with a mixture of joy and wonder.

"I have found," said the prince at his return to Imlac, "a man who can teach all that is necessary to be known; who, from the unshaken throne of rational fortitude, looks down on the scenes of life changing beneath him. He speaks, and attention watches his lips. He reasons, and conviction closes his periods.<sup>5</sup> This man shall be my future guide; I will learn his doctrines, and imitate his life."

"Be not too hasty," said Imlac, "to trust or to admire the teachers of morality: they discourse like angels, but they live like men."

Rasselas, who could not conceive how any man could reason so forcibly without feeling the cogency of his own arguments, paid his visit in a few days, and was denied admission. He had now learned the power of money, and made his way by a piece of gold to the inner apartment, where he found the philosopher in a room half darkened, with his eyes misty and his face pale. "Sir," said he, "you are come at a time when all human friendship is useless; what I suffer cannot be remedied, what I have lost cannot be supplied. My daughter, my only daughter, from whose tenderness I expected all the comforts of my age, died last night of a fever. My views, my purposes, my hopes are at an end; I am now a lonely being, disunited from society."

"Sir," said the prince, "mortality is an event by which a wise man can never be surprised; we know that death is always near, and it should therefore always be expected." "Young man," answered the philosopher, "you speak like one that has never felt the pangs of separation." "Have you then forgot the precepts," said Rasselas, "which you so powerfully enforced? Has wisdom no strength to arm the heart against calamity? Consider that external things are naturally variable, but truth and reason are always the same." "What comfort," said the mourner, "can truth and reason afford me? Of

what effect are they now, but to tell me that my daughter will not be restored?"

The prince, whose humanity would not suffer him to insult misery with reproof, went away, convinced of the emptiness of rhetorical sound, and the inefficacy of polished periods and studied sentences.<sup>6</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Audience.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Completed sentences.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Maxims or moral axioms.[Return to reference 6](#)

## **Chapter 19. A Glimpse of Pastoral Life**

He was still eager upon the same inquiry; and having heard of a hermit that lived near the lowest cataract of the Nile, and filled the whole country with the fame of his sanctity, resolved to visit his retreat, and inquire whether that felicity which public life could not afford was to be found in solitude; and whether a man whose age and virtue made him venerable could teach any peculiar art of shunning evils, or enduring them.

Imlac and the princess agreed to accompany him, and, after the necessary preparations, they began their journey. Their way lay through fields, where shepherds tended their flocks and the lambs were playing upon the pasture. "This," said the poet, "is the life which has been often celebrated for its innocence and quiet; let us pass the heat of the day among the shepherds' tents, and know whether all our searches are not to terminate in pastoral simplicity."

The proposal pleased them, and they induced the shepherds, by small presents and familiar questions, to tell their opinion of their own state. They were so rude and ignorant, so little able to compare the good with the evil of the occupation, and so indistinct in their narratives and descriptions, that very little could be learned from them. But it was evident that their hearts were cankered with discontent; that they considered themselves as condemned to labor for the luxury of the rich, and looked up with stupid malevolence toward those that were placed above them.

The princess pronounced with vehemence that she would never suffer these envious savages to be her companions, and that she should not soon be desirous of seeing any more specimens of rustic happiness; but could not believe that all the accounts of primeval pleasures were fabulous,<sup>7</sup> and was yet in doubt whether life had anything that could be justly preferred to the placid gratifications of fields and woods. She hoped that the time would come, when, with a few virtuous and elegant companions, she could gather flowers planted by her own hand, fondle the lambs of her own ewe, and

listen, without care, among brooks and breezes, to one of her maidens reading in the shade.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Fictional. [Return to reference 7](#)

## **Chapter 20. *The Danger of Prosperity***

On the next day they continued their journey, till the heat compelled them to look round for shelter. At a small distance they saw a thick wood, which they no sooner entered than they perceived that they were approaching the habitations of men. The shrubs were diligently cut away to open walks where the shades were darkest; the boughs of opposite trees were artificially interwoven; seats of flowery turf were raised in vacant spaces, and a rivulet, that wantoned along the side of a winding path, had its banks sometimes opened into small basins, and its stream sometimes obstructed by little mounds of stone heaped together to increase its murmurs.

They passed slowly through the wood, delighted with such unexpected accommodations, and entertained each other with conjecturing what, or who, he could be, that, in those rude and unfrequented regions, had leisure and art for such harmless luxury.

As they advanced, they heard the sound of music, and saw youths and virgins dancing in the grove; and, going still further, beheld a stately palace built upon a hill surrounded with woods. The laws of eastern hospitality allowed them to enter, and the master welcomed them like a man liberal and wealthy.

He was skilful enough in appearances soon to discern that they were no common guests, and spread his table with magnificence. The eloquence of Imlac caught his attention, and the lofty courtesy of the princess excited his respect. When they offered to depart he entreated their stay, and was the next day still more unwilling to dismiss them than before. They were easily persuaded to stop, and civility grew up in time to freedom and confidence.

The prince now saw all the domestics cheerful, and all the face of nature smiling round the place, and could not forbear to hope that he should find here what he was seeking; but when he was congratulating the master upon his possessions, he answered with a sigh, "My condition has indeed the appearance of happiness, but appearances are delusive. My prosperity puts my life in danger; the Bassa<sup>8</sup> of Egypt is my enemy, incensed only by my wealth and

popularity. I have been hitherto protected against him by the princes of the country; but, as the favor of the great is uncertain, I know not how soon my defenders may be persuaded to share the plunder with the Bassa. I have sent my treasures into a distant country, and, upon the first alarm, am prepared to follow them. Then will my enemies riot in my mansion, and enjoy the gardens which I have planted.”

They all joined in lamenting his danger, and deprecating his exile; and the princess was so much disturbed with the tumult of grief and indignation, that she retired to her apartment. They continued with their kind inviter a few days longer, and then went forward to find the hermit.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Pasha, a Turkish viceroy.[Return to reference 8](#)

## **Chapter 21. The Happiness of Solitude. The Hermit's History**

They came on the third day, by the direction of the peasants, to the hermit's cell: it was a cavern in the side of a mountain, overshadowed with palm-trees; at such a distance from the cataract, that nothing more was heard than a gentle uniform murmur, such as composed the mind to pensive meditation, especially when it was assisted by the wind whistling among the branches. The first rude essay of nature had been so much improved by human labor, that the cave contained several apartments, appropriated to different uses, and often afforded lodging to travelers, whom darkness or tempests happened to overtake.

The hermit sat on a bench at the door, to enjoy the coolness of the evening. On one side lay a book with pens and papers, on the other mechanical instruments of various kinds. As they approached him unregarded, the princess observed that he had not the countenance of a man that had found, or could teach, the way to happiness.

They saluted him with great respect, which he repaid like a man not unaccustomed to the forms of courts. "My children," said he, "if you have lost your way, you shall be willingly supplied with such conveniencies for the night as this cavern will afford. I have all that nature requires, and you will not expect delicacies in a hermit's cell."

They thanked him, and, entering, were pleased with the neatness and regularity of the place. The hermit set flesh and wine before them, though he fed only upon fruits and water. His discourse was cheerful without levity, and pious without enthusiasm.<sup>9</sup> He soon gained the esteem of his guests, and the princess repented of her hasty censure.

At last Imlac began thus: "I do not now wonder that your reputation is so far extended; we have heard at Cairo of your wisdom, and came hither to implore your direction for this young man and maiden in the *choice of life*."

"To him that lives well," answered the hermit, "every form of life is good; nor can I give any other rule for choice, than to remove

from all apparent evil."

"He will remove most certainly from evil," said the prince, "who shall devote himself to that solitude which you have recommended by your example."

"I have indeed lived fifteen years in solitude," said the hermit, "but have no desire that my example should gain any imitators. In my youth I professed arms, and was raised by degrees to the highest military rank. I have traversed wide countries at the head of my troops, and seen many battles and sieges. At last, being disgusted by the preferment of a younger officer, and feeling that my vigor was beginning to decay, I resolved to close my life in peace, having found the world full of snares, discord, and misery. I had once escaped from the pursuit of the enemy by the shelter of this cavern, and therefore chose it for my final residence. I employed artificers to form it into chambers, and stored it with all that I was likely to want.

"For some time after my retreat, I rejoiced like a tempest-beaten sailor at his entrance into the harbor, being delighted with the sudden change of the noise and hurry of war, to stillness and repose. When the pleasure of novelty went away, I employed my hours in examining the plants which grow in the valley, and the minerals which I collected from the rocks. But that inquiry is now grown tasteless and irksome. I have been for some time unsettled and distracted: my mind is disturbed with a thousand perplexities of doubt, and vanities of imagination, which hourly prevail upon me, because I have no opportunities of relaxation or diversion. I am sometimes ashamed to think that I could not secure myself from vice, but by retiring from the exercise of virtue, and begin to suspect that I was rather impelled by resentment, than led by devotion, into solitude. My fancy riots in scenes of folly, and I lament that I have lost so much, and have gained so little. In solitude, if I escape the example of bad men, I want likewise the counsel and conversation of the good. I have been long comparing the evils with the advantages of society, and resolve to return into the world



tomorrow. The life of a solitary man will be certainly miserable, but not certainly devout."

They heard his resolution with surprise, but, after a short pause, offered to conduct him to Cairo. He dug up a considerable treasure which he had hid among the rocks, and accompanied them to the city, on which, as he approached it, he gazed with rapture.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: "A vain belief of private revelation; a vain confidence of divine favor or communication" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 9](#)

## **Chapter 22. *The Happiness of a Life Led according to Nature***

Rasselas went often to an assembly of learned men, who met at stated times to unbend their minds and compare their opinions. Their manners were somewhat coarse, but their conversation was instructive, and their disputations acute, though sometimes too violent, and often continued till neither controvertist remembered upon what question they began. Some faults were almost general among them; everyone was desirous to dictate to the rest, and everyone was pleased to hear the genius or knowledge of another depreciated.

In this assembly Rasselas was relating his interview with the hermit, and the wonder with which he heard him censure a course of life which he had so deliberately chosen, and so laudably followed. The sentiments of the hearers were various. Some were of opinion that the folly of his choice had been justly punished by condemnation to perpetual perseverance. One of the youngest among them, with great vehemence, pronounced him an hypocrite. Some talked of the right of society to the labor of individuals, and considered retirement as a desertion of duty. Others readily allowed that there was a time when the claims of the public were satisfied, and when a man might properly sequester himself, to review his life and purify his heart.

One, who appeared more affected with the narrative than the rest, thought it likely that the hermit would in a few years go back to his retreat, and perhaps, if shame did not restrain, or death intercept him, return once more from his retreat into the world. "For the hope of happiness," said he, "is so strongly impressed that the longest experience is not able to efface it. Of the present state, whatever it be, we feel and are forced to confess the misery; yet when the same state is again at a distance, imagination paints it as desirable. But the time will surely come when desire will be no longer our torment, and no man shall be wretched but by his own fault."

"This," said a philosopher who had heard him with tokens of great impatience, "is the present condition of a wise man. The time

is already come when none are wretched but by their own fault. Nothing is more idle than to inquire after happiness, which nature has kindly placed within our reach. The way to be happy is to live according to nature, in obedience to that universal and unalterable law with which every heart is originally impressed; which is not written on it by precept, but engraven by destiny, not instilled by education, but infused at our nativity. He that lives according to nature will suffer nothing from the delusions of hope, or importunities of desire; he will receive and reject with equability of temper, and act or suffer as the reason of things shall alternately prescribe. Other men may amuse themselves with subtle definitions, or intricate ratiocination. Let them learn to be wise by easier means; let them observe the hind of the forest, and the linnet of the grove; let them consider the life of animals, whose motions are regulated by instinct; they obey their guide, and are happy. Let us therefore, at length, cease to dispute, and learn to live; throw away the encumbrance of precepts, which they who utter them with so much pride and pomp do not understand, and carry with us this simple and intelligible maxim, that deviation from nature is deviation from happiness."

When he had spoken, he looked round him with a placid air, and enjoyed the consciousness of his own beneficence. "Sir," said the prince with great modesty, "as I, like all the rest of mankind, am desirous of felicity, my closest attention has been fixed upon your discourse. I doubt not the truth of a position which a man so learned has so confidently advanced. Let me only know what it is to live according to nature."

"When I find young men so humble and so docile," said the philosopher, "I can deny them no information which my studies have enabled me to afford. To live according to nature, is to act always with due regard to the fitness arising from the relations and qualities of causes and effects; to concur with the great and unchangeable scheme of universal felicity; to co-operate with the general disposition and tendency of the present system of things."

The prince soon found that this was one of the sages whom he should understand less as he heard him longer. He therefore bowed and was silent; and the philosopher, supposing him satisfied, and the rest vanquished, rose up and departed with the air of a man that had co-operated with the present system.

### **Chapter 23. *The Prince and His Sister Divide between Them the Work of Observation***

Rasselas returned home full of reflections, doubtful how to direct his future steps. Of the way to happiness he found the learned and simple equally ignorant; but, as he was yet young, he flattered himself that he had time remaining for more experiments, and further inquiries. He communicated to Imlac his observations and his doubts, but was answered by him with new doubts, and remarks that gave him no comfort. He therefore discoursed more frequently and freely with his sister, who had yet the same hope with himself, and always assisted him to give some reason why, though he had been hitherto frustrated, he might succeed at last.

"We have hitherto," said she, "known but little of the world: we have never yet been either great or mean. In our own country, though we had royalty, we had no power, and in this we have not yet seen the private recesses of domestic peace. Imlac favors not our search, lest we should in time find him mistaken. We will divide the task between us: you shall try what is to be found in the splendor of courts, and I will range the shades of humbler life. Perhaps command and authority may be the supreme blessings, as they afford most opportunities of doing good: or, perhaps, what this world can give may be found in the modest habitations of middle fortune; too low for great designs, and too high for penury and distress."

## **Chapter 24. The Prince Examines the Happiness of High Stations**

Rasselas applauded the design, and appeared next day with a splendid retinue at the court of the Bassa. He was soon distinguished for his magnificence, and admitted, as a prince whose curiosity had brought him from distant countries, to an intimacy with the great officers, and frequent conversation with the Bassa himself.

He was at first inclined to believe, that the man must be pleased with his own condition, whom all approached with reverence, and heard with obedience, and who had the power to extend his edicts to a whole kingdom. "There can be no pleasure," said he, "equal to that of feeling at once the joy of thousands all made happy by wise administration. Yet, since, by the law of subordination, this sublime delight can be in one nation but the lot of one, it is surely reasonable to think that there is some satisfaction more popular<sup>1</sup> and accessible, and that millions can hardly be subjected to the will of a single man, only to fill his particular breast with incommunicable content."

These thoughts were often in his mind, and he found no solution of the difficulty. But as presents and civilities gained him more familiarity, he found that almost every man who stood high in employment hated all the rest, and was hated by them, and that their lives were a continual succession of plots and detections, stratagems and escapes, faction and treachery. Many of those, who surrounded the Bassa, were sent only to watch and report his conduct; every tongue was muttering censure and every eye was searching for a fault.

At last the letters of revocation arrived, the Bassa was carried in chains to Constantinople, and his name was mentioned no more.

"What are we now to think of the prerogatives of power," said Rasselas to his sister; "is it without any efficacy to good? or, is the subordinate degree only dangerous, and the supreme safe and glorious? Is the Sultan the only happy man in his dominions? or, is

the Sultan himself subject to the torments of suspicion, and the dread of enemies?”

In a short time the second Bassa was deposed. The Sultan, that had advanced him, was murdered by the Janisaries,<sup>2</sup> and his successor had other views and different favorites.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Common.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Guards of the Turkish ruler.[Return to reference 2](#)

## **Chapter 25. *The Princess Pursues Her Inquiry with More Diligence Than Success***

The princess, in the mean time, insinuated herself into many families; for there are few doors, through which liberality, joined with good humor, cannot find its way. The daughters of many houses were airy<sup>3</sup> and cheerful, but Nekayah had been too long accustomed to the conversation of Imlac and her brother to be much pleased with childish levity and prattle which had no meaning. She found their thoughts narrow, their wishes low, and their merriment often artificial. Their pleasures, poor as they were, could not be preserved pure, but were embittered by petty competitions and worthless emulation. They were always jealous of the beauty of each other; of a quality to which solicitude can add nothing, and from which detraction can take nothing away. Many were in love with triflers like themselves, and many fancied that they were in love when in truth they were only idle. Their affection was seldom fixed on sense or virtue, and therefore seldom ended but in vexation. Their grief, however, like their joy, was transient; everything floated in their mind unconnected with the past or future, so that one desire easily gave way to another, as a second stone cast into the water effaces and confounds the circles of the first.

With these girls she played as with inoffensive animals, and found them proud of her countenance,<sup>4</sup> and weary of her company.

But her purpose was to examine more deeply, and her affability easily persuaded the hearts that were swelling with sorrow to discharge their secrets in her ear: and those whom hope flattered, or prosperity delighted, often courted her to partake their pleasures.

The princess and her brother commonly met in the evening in a private summer-house on the bank of the Nile, and related to each other the occurrences of the day. As they were sitting together, the princess cast her eyes upon the river that flowed before her.

"Answer," said she, "great father of waters, thou that rollest thy floods through eighty nations, to the invocations of the daughter of thy native king. Tell me if thou waterest, through all thy course, a



single habitation from which thou dost not hear the murmurs of complaint?"

"You are then," said Rasselas, "not more successful in private houses than I have been in courts." "I have, since the last partition of our provinces,"<sup>5</sup> said the princess, "enabled myself to enter familiarly into many families, where there was the fairest show of prosperity and peace, and know not one house that is not haunted by some fury that destroys its quiet.

"I did not seek ease among the poor, because I concluded that there it could not be found. But I saw many poor whom I had supposed to live in affluence. Poverty has, in large cities, very different appearances: it is often concealed in splendor, and often in extravagance. It is the care of a very great part of mankind to conceal their indigence from the rest: they support themselves by temporary expedients, and every day is lost in contriving for the morrow.

"This, however, was an evil, which, though frequent, I saw with less pain, because I could relieve it. Yet some have refused my bounties; more offended with my quickness to detect their wants, than pleased with my readiness to succor them: and others, whose exigencies compelled them to admit my kindness, have never been able to forgive their benefactress. Many, however, have been sincerely grateful without the ostentation of gratitude, or the hope of other favors."

## Endnotes

- Note 3: "Gay; sprightly; full of mirth" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Patronage, favor.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Division of our responsibilities.[Return to reference 5](#)

## **Chapter 26. *The Princess Continues Her Remarks upon Private Life***

Nekayah, perceiving her brother's attention fixed, proceeded in her narrative.

"In families where there is or is not poverty, there is commonly discord. If a kingdom be, as Imlac tells us, a great family, a family likewise is a little kingdom, torn with factions and exposed to revolutions. An unpracticed observer expects the love of parents and children to be constant and equal; but this kindness seldom continues beyond the years of infancy: in a short time the children become rivals to their parents. Benefits are allayed<sup>6</sup> by reproaches, and gratitude debased by envy.

"Parents and children seldom act in concert; each child endeavors to appropriate the esteem or fondness of the parents, and the parents, with yet less temptation, betray each other to their children. Thus, some place their confidence in the father, and some in the mother, and by degrees the house is filled with artifices and feuds.

"The opinions of children and parents, of the young and the old, are naturally opposite, by the contrary effects of hope and despondence, of expectation and experience, without crime or folly on either side. The colors of life in youth and age appear different, as the face of nature in spring and winter. And how can children credit the assertions of parents, which their own eyes show them to be false?

"Few parents act in such a manner as much to enforce their maxims by the credit of their lives. The old man trusts wholly to slow contrivance and gradual progression; the youth expects to force his way by genius, vigor, and precipitance. The old man pays regard to riches, and the youth reverences virtue. The old man deifies prudence; the youth commits himself to magnanimity and chance. The young man, who intends no ill, believes that none is intended, and therefore acts with openness and candor; but his father, having suffered the injuries of fraud, is impelled to suspect, and too often

allured to practice it. Age looks with anger on the temerity of youth, and youth with contempt on the scrupulosity<sup>2</sup> of age. Thus parents and children, for the greatest part, live on to love less and less; and, if those whom nature has thus closely united are the torments of each other, where shall we look for tenderness and consolation?"

"Surely," said the prince, "you must have been unfortunate in your choice of acquaintance: I am unwilling to believe that the most tender of all relations is thus impeded in its effects by natural necessity."

"Domestic discord," answered she, "is not inevitably and fatally necessary, but yet is not easily avoided. We seldom see that a whole family is virtuous; the good and evil cannot well agree, and the evil can yet less agree with one another. Even the virtuous fall sometimes to variance, when their virtues are of different kinds, and tending to extremes. In general, those parents have most reverence who most deserve it; for he that lives well cannot be despised.

"Many other evils infest private life. Some are the slaves of servants whom they have trusted with their affairs. Some are kept in continual anxiety to the caprice of rich relations, whom they cannot please, and dare not offend. Some husbands are imperious, and some wives perverse; and, as it is always more easy to do evil than good, though the wisdom or virtue of one can very rarely make many happy, the folly or vice of one may often make many miserable."

"If such be the general effect of marriage," said the prince, "I shall for the future think it dangerous to connect my interest with that of another, lest I should be unhappy by my partner's fault."

"I have met," said the princess, "with many who live single for that reason; but I never found that their prudence ought to raise envy. They dream away their time without friendship, without fondness, and are driven to rid themselves of the day, for which they have no use, by childish amusements, or vicious delights. They act as beings under the constant sense of some known inferiority that fills their minds with rancor, and their tongues with censure. They are peevish at home, and malevolent abroad; and, as the outlaws of

human nature, make it their business and their pleasure to disturb that society which debars them from its privileges. To live without feeling or exciting sympathy, to be fortunate without adding to the felicity of others, or afflicted without tasting the balm of pity, is a state more gloomy than solitude; it is not retreat but exclusion from mankind. Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures."

"What then is to be done?" said Rasselas; "the more we inquire, the less we can resolve. Surely he is most likely to please himself that has no other inclination to regard."

## Endnotes

- Note 6: To allay is "to join anything to another, so as to abate its predominant qualities" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "Fear of acting in any manner" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 7](#)

## **Chapter 27. Disquisition upon Greatness**

The conversation had a short pause. The prince, having considered his sister's observations, told her, that she had surveyed life with prejudice, and supposed misery where she did not find it. "Your narrative," says he, "throws yet a darker gloom upon the prospects of futurity: the predictions of Imlac were but faint sketches of the evils painted by Nekayah. I have been lately, convinced that quiet is not the daughter of grandeur, or of power: that her presence is not to be bought by wealth, nor enforced by conquest. It is evident, that as any man acts in a wider compass, he must be more exposed to opposition from enmity or miscarriage from chance; whoever has many to please or to govern, must use the ministry of many agents, some of whom will be wicked, and some ignorant; by some he will be misled, and by others betrayed. If he gratifies one he will offend another: those that are not favored will think themselves injured; and, since favors can be conferred but upon few, the greater number will be always discontented."

"The discontent," said the princess, "which is thus unreasonable, I hope that I shall always have spirit to despise, and you, power to repress."

"Discontent," answered Rasselas, "will not always be without reason under the most just or vigilant administration of public affairs. None, however attentive, can always discover that merit which indigence or faction may happen to obscure; and none, however powerful, can always reward it. Yet, he that sees inferior desert<sup>8</sup> advanced above him, will naturally impute that preference to partiality or caprice; and, indeed, it can scarcely be hoped that any man, however magnanimous by nature, or exalted by condition, will be able to persist for ever in fixed and inexorable justice of distribution: he will sometimes indulge his own affections, and sometimes those of his favorites; he will permit some to please him who can never serve him; he will discover in those whom he loves qualities which in reality they do not possess; and to those, from whom he receives pleasure, he will in his turn endeavor to give it.

Thus will recommendations sometimes prevail which were purchased by money, or by the more destructive bribery of flattery and servility.

"He that has much to do will do something wrong, and of that wrong must suffer the consequences; and, if it were possible that he should always act rightly, yet when such numbers are to judge of his conduct, the bad will censure and obstruct him by malevolence, and the good sometimes by mistake.

"The highest stations cannot therefore hope to be the abodes of happiness, which I would willingly believe to have fled from thrones and palaces to seats of humble privacy and placid obscurity. For what can hinder the satisfaction, or intercept the expectations, of him whose abilities are adequate to his employments, who sees with his own eyes the whole circuit of his influence, who chooses by his own knowledge all whom he trusts, and whom none are tempted to deceive by hope or fear? Surely he has nothing to do but to love and to be loved, to be virtuous and to be happy."

"Whether perfect happiness would be procured by perfect goodness," said Nekayah, "this world will never afford an opportunity of deciding. But this, at least, may be maintained, that we do not always find visible happiness in proportion to visible virtue. All natural and almost all political evils, are incident alike to the bad and good: they are confounded in the misery of a famine, and not much distinguished in the fury of a faction; they sink together in a tempest, and are driven together from their country by invaders. All that virtue can afford is quietness of conscience, a steady prospect of a happier state; this may enable us to endure calamity with patience; but remember that patience must suppose pain."

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Merit; one deserving reward. [Return to reference 8](#)

## **Chapter 28. *Rasselas and Nekayah Continue Their Conversation***

"Dear princess," said Rasselas, "you fall into the common errors of exaggeratory declamation, by producing, in a familiar disquisition,<sup>9</sup> examples of national calamities, and scenes of extensive misery, which are found in books rather than in the world, and which, as they are horrid, are ordained to be rare. Let us not imagine evils which we do not feel, nor injure life by misrepresentations. I cannot bear that querulous eloquence which threatens every city with a siege like that of Jerusalem,<sup>1</sup> that makes famine attend on every flight of locusts, and suspends pestilence on the wing of every blast that issues from the south.

"On necessary and inevitable evils, which overwhelm kingdoms at once, all disputation is vain: when they happen they must be endured. But it is evident, that these bursts of universal distress are more dreaded than felt: thousands and ten thousands flourish in youth, and wither in age, without the knowledge of any other than domestic evils, and share the same pleasures and vexations whether their kings are mild or cruel, whether the armies of their country pursue their enemies, or retreat before them. While courts are disturbed with intestine<sup>2</sup> competitions, and ambassadors are negotiating in foreign countries, the smith still plies his anvil, and the husbandman drives his plow forward; the necessaries of life are required and obtained, and the successive business of the seasons continues to make its wonted revolutions.

"Let us cease to consider what, perhaps, may never happen, and what, when it shall happen, will laugh at human speculation. We will not endeavor to modify the motions of the elements, or to fix the destiny of kingdoms. It is our business to consider what beings like us may perform; each laboring for his own happiness, by promoting within his circle, however narrow, the happiness of others.

"Marriage is evidently the dictate of nature; men and women were made to be companions of each other, and therefore I cannot be persuaded but that marriage is one of the means of happiness."

"I know not," said the princess, "whether marriage be more than one of the innumerable modes of human misery. When I see and reckon the various forms of connubial infelicity, the unexpected causes of lasting discord, the diversities of temper, the oppositions of opinion, the rude collisions of contrary desire where both are urged by violent impulses, the obstinate contests of disagreeing virtues, where both are supported by consciousness of good intention, I am sometimes disposed to think with the severer casuists of most nations, that marriage is rather permitted than approved, and that none, but by the instigation of a passion too much indulged, entangle themselves with indissoluble compacts."

"You seem to forget," replied Rasselas, "that you have, even now, represented celibacy as less happy than marriage. Both conditions may be bad, but they cannot both be worst. Thus it happens when wrong opinions are entertained, that they mutually destroy each other, and leave the mind open to truth."

"I did not expect," answered the princess, "to hear that imputed to falsehood which is the consequence only of frailty. To the mind, as to the eye, it is difficult to compare with exactness objects vast in their extent, and various in their parts. Where we see or conceive the whole at once we readily note the discriminations and decide the preference: but of two systems, of which neither can be surveyed by any human being in its full compass of magnitude and multiplicity of complication, where is the wonder, that judging of the whole by parts, I am alternately affected by one and the other as either presses on my memory or fancy? We differ from ourselves just as we differ from each other, when we see only part of the question, as in the multifarious relations of politics and morality: but when we perceive the whole at once, as in numerical computations, all agree in one judgment, and none ever varies his opinion."

"Let us not add," said the prince, "to the other evils of life, the bitterness of controversy, nor endeavor to vie with each other in subtleties of argument. We are employed in a search, of which both are equally to enjoy the success, or suffer by the miscarriage. It is therefore fit that we assist each other. You surely conclude too



hastily from the infelicity of marriage against its institution; will not the misery of life prove equally that life cannot be the gift of heaven? The world must be peopled by marriage, or peopled without it."

"How the world is to be peopled," returned Nekayah, "is not my care, and needs not be yours. I see no danger that the present generation should omit to leave successors behind them: we are not now inquiring for the world, but for ourselves."

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Family discussion of a question.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In 70 C.E. the Romans, under Titus, besieged and destroyed Jerusalem.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Internal, domestic.[Return to reference 2](#)

## **Chapter 29. *The Debate on Marriage Continued***

"The good of the whole," says Rasselas, "is the same with the good of all its parts. If marriage be best for mankind it must be evidently best for individuals, or a permanent and necessary duty must be the cause of evil, and some must be inevitably sacrificed to the convenience of others. In the estimate which you have made of the two states, it appears that the inconveniences of a single life are, in a great measure, necessary and certain, but those of the conjugal state accidental and avoidable.

"I cannot forbear to flatter myself that prudence and benevolence will make marriage happy. The general folly of mankind is the cause of general complaint. What can be expected but disappointment and repentance from a choice made in the immaturity of youth, in the ardor of desire, without judgment, without foresight, without inquiry after conformity of opinions, similarity of manners, rectitude of judgment, or purity of sentiment.

"Such is the common process of marriage. A youth and maiden meeting by chance, or brought together by artifice, exchange glances, reciprocate civilities, go home, and dream of one another. Having little to divert attention, or diversify thought, they find themselves uneasy when they are apart, and therefore conclude that they shall be happy together. They marry, and discover what nothing but voluntary blindness had before concealed; they wear out life in altercations, and charge nature with cruelty.

"From those early marriages proceeds likewise the rivalry of parents and children: the son is eager to enjoy the world before the father is willing to forsake it, and there is hardly room at once for two generations. The daughter begins to bloom before the mother can be content to fade, and neither can forbear to wish for the absence of the other.

"Surely all these evils may be avoided by that deliberation and delay which prudence prescribes to irrevocable choice. In the variety and jollity of youthful pleasures life may be well enough supported without the help of a partner. Longer time will increase experience,

and wider views will allow better opportunities of inquiry and selection: one advantage, at least, will be certain; the parents will be visibly older than their children."

"What reason cannot collect," said Nekayah, "and what experiment has not yet taught, can be known only from the report of others. I have been told that late marriages are not eminently happy. This is a question too important to be neglected, and I have often proposed it to those, whose accuracy of remark, and comprehensiveness of knowledge, made their suffrages<sup>3</sup> worthy of regard. They have generally determined that it is dangerous for a man and woman to suspend their fate upon each other, at a time when opinions are fixed, and habits are established; when friendships have been contracted on both sides, when life has been planned into method, and the mind has long enjoyed the contemplation of its own prospects.

"It is scarcely possible that two traveling through the world under the conduct of chance should have been both directed to the same path, and it will not often happen that either will quit the track which custom has made pleasing. When the desultory levity of youth has settled into regularity, it is soon succeeded by pride ashamed to yield, or obstinacy delighting to contend. And even though mutual esteem produces mutual desire to please, time itself, as it modifies unchangeably the external mien, determines likewise the direction of the passions, and gives an inflexible rigidity to the manners. Long customs are not easily broken: he that attempts to change the course of his own life very often labors in vain; and how shall we do that for others which we are seldom able to do for ourselves?"

"But surely," interposed the prince, "you suppose the chief motive of choice forgotten or neglected. Whenever I shall seek a wife, it shall be my first question, whether she be willing to be led by reason?"

"Thus it is," said Nekayah, "that philosophers are deceived. There are a thousand familiar<sup>4</sup> disputes which reason never can decide; questions that elude investigation, and make logic ridiculous; cases where something must be done, and where little can be said.

Consider the state of mankind, and inquire how few can be supposed to act upon any occasions, whether small or great, with all the reasons of action present to their minds. Wretched would be the pair above all names of wretchedness, who should be doomed to adjust by reason every morning all the minute detail of a domestic day.

"Those who marry at an advanced age will probably escape the encroachments of their children; but, in diminution of this advantage, they will be likely to leave them, ignorant and helpless, to a guardian's mercy: or, if that should not happen, they must at least go out of the world before they see those whom they love best either wise or great.

"From their children, if they have less to fear, they have less also to hope, and they lose, without equivalent, the joys of early love, and the convenience of uniting with manners pliant and minds susceptible of new impressions, which might wear away their dissimilitudes by long cohabitation, as soft bodies, by continual attrition, conform their surfaces to each other.

"I believe it will be found that those who marry late are best pleased with their children, and those who marry early with their partners."

"The union of these two affections," said Rasselas, "would produce all that could be wished. Perhaps there is a time when marriage might unite them, a time neither too early for the father, nor too late for the husband."

"Every hour," answered the princess, "confirms my prejudice in favor of the position so often uttered by the mouth of Imlac, 'That nature sets her gifts on the right hand and on the left.' Those conditions, which flatter hope and attract desire, are so constituted that, as we approach one, we recede from another. There are goods so opposed that we cannot seize both, but, by too much prudence, may pass between them at too great a distance to reach either. This is often the fate of long consideration; he does nothing who endeavors to do more than is allowed to humanity. Flatter not yourself with contrarieties of pleasure. Of the blessings set before

you make your choice, and be content. No man can taste the fruits of autumn, while he is delighting his scent with the flowers of the spring: no man can, at the same time, fill his cup from the source and from the mouth of the Nile.”

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Opinions.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Domestic.[Return to reference 4](#)

### **Chapter 30. Imlac Enters, and Changes the Conversation**

Here Imlac entered, and interrupted them. "Imlac," said Rasselas, "I have been taking from the princess the dismal history of private life, and am almost discouraged from further search."

"It seems to me," said Imlac, "that while you are making the choice of life, you neglect to live. You wander about a single city, which, however large and diversified, can now afford few novelties, and forget that you are in a country, famous among the earliest monarchies for the power and wisdom of its inhabitants; a country where the sciences first dawned that illuminate the world, and beyond which the arts cannot be traced of civil society or domestic life.

"The old Egyptians have left behind them monuments of industry and power before which all European magnificence is confessed to fade away. The ruins of their architecture are the schools of modern builders, and from the wonders which time has spared we may conjecture, though uncertainly, what it has destroyed."

"My curiosity," said Rasselas, "does not very strongly lead me to survey piles of stone, or mounds of earth; my business is with man. I came hither not to measure fragments of temples, or trace choked aqueducts, but to look upon the various scenes of the present world."

"The things that are now before us," said the princess, "require attention, and deserve it. What have I to do with the heroes or the monuments of ancient times? with times which never can return, and heroes, whose form of life was different from all that the present condition of mankind requires or allows."

"To know anything," returned the poet, "we must know its effects; to see men we must see their works, that we may learn what reason has dictated, or passion has incited, and find what are the most powerful motives of action. To judge rightly of the present we must oppose it to the past; for all judgment is comparative, and of the future nothing can be known. The truth is, that no mind is much employed upon the present: recollection and anticipation fill

up almost all our moments. Our passions are joy and grief, love and hatred, hope and fear. Of joy and grief the past is the object, and the future of hope and fear; even love and hatred respect the past, for the cause must have been before the effect.

"The present state of things is the consequence of the former, and it is natural to inquire what were the sources of the good that we enjoy, or of the evil that we suffer. If we act only for ourselves, to neglect the study of history is not prudent: if we are entrusted with the care of others, it is not just. Ignorance, when it is voluntary, is criminal; and he may properly be charged with evil who refused to learn how he might prevent it.

"There is no part of history so generally useful as that which relates the progress of the human mind, the gradual improvement of reason, the successive advances of science, the vicissitudes of learning and ignorance, which are the light and darkness of thinking beings, the extinction and resuscitation of arts, and all the revolutions of the intellectual world. If accounts of battles and invasions are peculiarly the business of princes, the useful or elegant arts are not to be neglected; those who have kingdoms to govern, have understandings to cultivate.

"Example is always more efficacious than precept. A soldier is formed in war, and a painter must copy pictures. In this, contemplative life has the advantage: great actions are seldom seen, but the labors of art are always at hand for those who desire to know what art has been able to perform.

"When the eye or the imagination is struck with any uncommon work the next transition of an active mind is to the means by which it was performed. Here begins the true use of such contemplation; we enlarge our comprehension by new ideas, and perhaps recover some art lost to mankind, or learn what is less perfectly known in our own country. At least we compare our own with former times, and either rejoice at our improvements, or, what is the first motion towards good, discover our defects."

"I am willing," said the prince, "to see all that can deserve my search." "And I," said the princess, "shall rejoice to learn something

of the manners of antiquity.”

“The most pompous monument of Egyptian greatness, and one of the most bulky works of manual industry,” said Imlac, “are the pyramids; fabrics<sup>5</sup> raised before the time of history, and of which the earliest narratives afford us only uncertain traditions. Of these the greatest is still standing, very little injured by time.”

“Let us visit them tomorrow,” said Nekayah. “I have often heard of the pyramids, and shall not rest, till I have seen them within and without with my own eyes.”

## Endnotes

- Note 5: Buildings.[Return to reference 5](#)



### **Chapter 31. They Visit the Pyramids**

The resolution being thus taken, they set out the next day. They laid tents upon their camels, being resolved to stay among the pyramids till their curiosity was fully satisfied. They traveled gently, turned aside to everything remarkable, stopped from time to time and conversed with the inhabitants, and observed the various appearances of towns ruined and inhabited, of wild and cultivated nature.

When they came to the great pyramid, they were astonished at the extent of the base, and the height of the top. Imlac explained to them the principles upon which the pyramidal form was chosen for a fabric intended to coextend its duration with that of the world; he showed that its gradual diminution gave it such stability as defeated all the common attacks of the elements, and could scarcely be overthrown by earthquakes themselves, the least resistible of natural violence. A concussion that should shatter the pyramid would threaten the dissolution of the continent.

They measured all its dimensions, and pitched their tents at its foot. Next day they prepared to enter its interior apartments, and having hired the common guides, climbed up to the first passage, when the favorite of the princess, looking into the cavity, stepped back and trembled. "Pekuah," said the princess, "of what art thou afraid?" "Of the narrow entrance," answered the lady, "and of the dreadful gloom. I dare not enter a place which must surely be inhabited by unquiet souls. The original possessors of these dreadful vaults will start up before us, and perhaps shut us in forever." She spoke, and threw her arms round the neck of her mistress.

"If all your fear be of apparitions," said the prince, "I will promise you safety. There is no danger from the dead; he that is once buried will be seen no more."

"That the dead are seen no more," said Imlac, "I will not undertake to maintain, against the concurrent and unvaried testimony of all ages, and of all nations. There is no people, rude or learned, among whom apparitions of the dead are not related and

believed. This opinion, which perhaps prevails as far as human nature is diffused, could become universal only by its truth; those that never heard of one another would not have agreed in a tale which nothing but experience can make credible. That it is doubted by single cavilers can very little weaken the general evidence; and some who deny it with their tongues confess it by their fears.

"Yet I do not mean to add new terrors to those which have already seized upon Pekuah. There can be no reason why specters should haunt the pyramid more than other places, or why they should have power or will to hurt innocence and purity. Our entrance is no violation of their privileges; we can take nothing from them, how then can we offend them?"

"My dear Pekuah," said the princess, "I will always go before you, and Imlac shall follow you. Remember that you are the companion of the princess of Abyssinia."

"If the princess is pleased that her servant should die," returned the lady, "let her command some death less dreadful than enclosure in this horrid cavern. You know I dare not disobey you; I must go if you command me, but if I once enter, I never shall come back."

The princess saw that her fear was too strong for expostulation or reproof, and, embracing her, told her that she should stay in the tent till their return. Pekuah was yet not satisfied, but entreated the princess not to pursue so dreadful a purpose as that of entering the recesses of the pyramid. "Though I cannot teach courage," said Nekayah, "I must not learn cowardice, nor leave at last undone what I came hither only to do."

### ***Chapter 32. They Enter the Pyramid***

Pekuah descended to the tents, and the rest entered the pyramid. They passed through the galleries, surveyed the vaults of marble, and examined the chest in which the body of the founder is supposed to have been repositied. They then sat down in one of the most spacious chambers to rest a while before they attempted to return.

"We have now," said Imlac, "gratified our minds with an exact view of the greatest work of man, except the wall of China.

"Of the wall it is very easy to assign the motive. It secured a wealthy and timorous nation from the incursions of barbarians, whose unskillfulness in arts made it easier for them to supply their wants by rapine than by industry, and who from time to time poured in upon the habitations of peaceful commerce, as vultures descend upon domestic fowl. Their celerity and fierceness made the wall necessary, and their ignorance made it efficacious.

"But for the pyramids, no reason has ever been given adequate to the cost and labor of the work. The narrowness of the chambers proves that it could afford no retreat from enemies, and treasures might have been repositied at far less expense with equal security. It seems to have been erected only in compliance with that hunger of imagination which preys incessantly upon life, and must be always appeased by some employment. Those who have already all that they can enjoy must enlarge their desires. He that has built for use till use is supplied, must begin to build for vanity, and extend his plan to the utmost power of human performance, that he may not be soon reduced to form another wish.

"I consider this mighty structure as a monument of the insufficiency of human enjoyments. A king, whose power is unlimited, and whose treasures surmount all real and imaginary wants, is compelled to solace, by the erection of a pyramid, the satiety of dominion and tastelessness of pleasures, and to amuse the tediousness of declining life by seeing thousands laboring without end, and one stone, for no purpose, laid upon another. Whoever

thou art, that, not content with a moderate condition, imaginest happiness in royal magnificence, and dreamest that command or riches can feed the appetite of novelty with perpetual gratifications, survey the pyramids, and confess thy folly!"

### **Chapter 33. *The Princess Meets with an Unexpected Misfortune***

They rose up, and returned through the cavity at which they had entered, and the princess prepared for her favorite a long narrative of dark labyrinths, and costly rooms, and of the different impressions which the varieties of the way had made upon her. But when they came to their train, they found every one silent and dejected: the men discovered<sup>6</sup> shame and fear in their countenances, and the women were weeping in the tents.

What had happened they did not try to conjecture, but immediately inquired. "You had scarcely entered into the pyramid," said one of the attendants, "when a troop of Arabs rushed upon us: we were too few to resist them, and too slow to escape. They were about to search the tents, set us on our camels, and drive us along before them, when the approach of some Turkish horsemen put them to flight; but they seized the lady Pekuah with her two maids, and carried them away: the Turks are now pursuing them by our instigation, but I fear they will not be able to overtake them."

The princess was overpowered with surprise and grief. Rasselas, in the first heat of his resentment, ordered his servants to follow him, and prepared to pursue the robbers with his saber in his hand. "Sir," said Imlac, "what can you hope from violence or valor? the Arabs are mounted on horses trained to battle and retreat; we have only beasts of burden. By leaving our present station we may lose the princess, but cannot hope to regain Pekuah."

In a short time the Turks returned, having not been able to reach the enemy. The princess burst out into new lamentations, and Rasselas could scarcely forbear to reproach them with cowardice; but Imlac was of opinion, that the escape of the Arabs was no addition to their misfortune, for, perhaps, they would have killed their captives rather than have resigned them.

## **Endnotes**

- Note 6: Revealed, betrayed. “Train”: retinue. [Return to reference 6](#)

### **Chapter 34. They Return to Cairo without Pekuah**

There was nothing to be hoped from longer stay. They returned to Cairo repenting of their curiosity, censuring the negligence of the government, lamenting their own rashness which had neglected to procure a guard, imagining many expedients by which the loss of Pekuah might have been prevented, and resolving to do something for her recovery, though none could find any thing proper to be done.

Nekayah retired to her chamber, where her women attempted to comfort her, by telling her that all had their troubles, and that lady Pekuah had enjoyed much happiness in the world for a long time, and might reasonably expect a change of fortune. They hoped that some good would befall her wheresoever she was, and that their mistress would find another friend who might supply her place.

The princess made them no answer, and they continued the form of condolence, not much grieved in their hearts that the favorite was lost.

Next day the prince presented to the Bassa a memorial<sup>7</sup> of the wrong which he had suffered, and a petition for redress. The Bassa threatened to punish the robbers, but did not attempt to catch them, nor, indeed, could any account or description be given by which he might direct the pursuit.

It soon appeared that nothing would be done by authority. Governors, being accustomed to hear of more crimes than they can punish, and more wrongs than they can redress, set themselves at ease by indiscriminate negligence, and presently<sup>8</sup> forget the request when they lose sight of the petitioner.

Imlac then endeavored to gain some intelligence by private agents. He found many who pretended to an exact knowledge of all the haunts of the Arabs, and to regular correspondence with their chiefs, and who readily undertook the recovery of Pekuah. Of these, some were furnished with money for their journey, and came back no more; some were liberally paid for accounts which a few days discovered to be false. But the princess would not suffer any means,

however improbable, to be left untried. While she was doing something she kept her hope alive. As one expedient failed, another was suggested; when one messenger returned unsuccessful, another was dispatched to a different quarter.

Two months had now passed, and of Pekuah nothing had been heard; the hopes which they had endeavored to raise in each other grew more languid, and the princess, when she saw nothing more to be tried, sunk down inconsolable in hopeless dejection. A thousand times she reproached herself with the easy compliance by which she permitted her favorite to stay behind her. "Had not my fondness," said she, "lessened my authority, Pekuah had not dared to talk of her terrors. She ought to have feared me more than specters. A severe look would have overpowered her; a peremptory command would have compelled obedience. Why did foolish indulgence prevail upon me? Why did I not speak and refuse to hear?"

"Great princess," said Imlac, "do not reproach yourself for your virtue, or consider that as blameable by which evil has accidentally been caused. Your tenderness for the timidity of Pekuah was generous and kind. When we act according to our duty, we commit the event to him by whose laws our actions are governed, and who will suffer none to be finally punished for obedience. When, in prospect of some good, whether natural or moral, we break the rules prescribed us, we withdraw from the direction of superior wisdom, and take all consequences upon ourselves. Man cannot so far know the connection of causes and events, as that he may venture to do wrong in order to do right. When we pursue our end by lawful means, we may always console our miscarriage by the hope of future recompense. When we consult only our own policy, and attempt to find a nearer way to good, by overleaping the settled boundaries of right and wrong, we cannot be happy even by success, because we cannot escape the consciousness of our fault; but, if we miscarry, the disappointment is irremediably embittered. How comfortless is the sorrow of him, who feels at once the pangs of guilt, and the vexation of calamity which guilt has brought upon him?"



“Consider, princess, what would have been your condition, if the lady Pekuah had entreated to accompany you, and, being compelled to stay in the tents, had been carried away; or how would you have borne the thought, if you had forced her into the pyramid, and she had died before you in agonies of terror.”

“Had either happened,” said Nekayah, “I could not have endured life till now: I should have been tortured to madness by the remembrance of such cruelty, or must have pined away in abhorrence of myself.”

“This at least,” said Imlac, “is the present reward of virtuous conduct, that no unlucky consequence can oblige us to repent it.”

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Statement of facts.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Immediately.[Return to reference 8](#)

### **Chapter 35. *The Princess Languishes for Want of Pekuah***

Nekayah, being thus reconciled to herself, found that no evil is insupportable but that which is accompanied with consciousness of wrong. She was, from that time, delivered from the violence of tempestuous sorrow, and sunk into silent pensiveness and gloomy tranquillity. She sat from morning to evening recollecting all that had been done or said by her Pekuah, treasured up with might recall to mind any little incident or careless conversation. The sentiments of her, whom she now expected to see no more, were treasured in her memory as rules of life, and she deliberated to no other end than to conjecture on any occasion what would have been the opinion and counsel of Pekuah.

The women, by whom she was attended, knew nothing of her real condition, and therefore she could not talk to them but with caution and reserve. She began to remit<sup>9</sup> her curiosity, having no great care to collect notions which she had no convenience of uttering. Rasselas endeavored first to comfort and afterwards to divert her; he hired musicians, to whom she seemed to listen, but did not hear them, and procured masters to instruct her in various arts, whose lectures, when they visited her again, were again to be repeated. She had lost her taste of pleasure and her ambition of excellence. And her mind, though forced into short excursions, always recurred to the image of her friend.

Imlac was every morning earnestly enjoined to renew his inquiries, and was asked every night whether he had yet heard of Pekuah, till not being able to return the princess the answer that she desired, he was less and less willing to come into her presence. She observed his backwardness, and commanded him to attend her. "You are not," said she, "to confound impatience with resentment, or to suppose that I charge you with negligence, because I repine at your unsuccessfulness. I do not much wonder at your absence; I know that the unhappy are never pleasing, and that all naturally avoid the contagion of misery. To hear complaints is wearisome alike to the wretched and the happy; for who would cloud by adventitious grief

the short gleams of gaiety which life allows us? or who, that is struggling under his own evils, will add to them the miseries of another?

"The time is at hand, when none shall be disturbed any longer by the sighs of Nekayah: my search after happiness is now at an end. I am resolved to retire from the world with all its flatteries and deceits, and will hide myself in solitude, without any other care than to compose my thoughts, and regulate my hours by a constant succession of innocent occupations, till, with a mind purified from all earthly desires, I shall enter into that state, to which all are hastening, and in which I hope again to enjoy the friendship of Pekuah."

"Do not entangle your mind," said Imlac, "by irrevocable determinations, nor increase the burden of life by a voluntary accumulation of misery: the weariness of retirement will continue or increase when the loss of Pekuah is forgotten. That you have been deprived of one pleasure is no very good reason for rejection of the rest."

"Since Pekuah was taken from me," said the princess, "I have no pleasure to reject or to retain. She that has no one to love or trust has little to hope. She wants the radical principle of happiness. We may, perhaps, allow that what satisfaction this world can afford, must arise from the conjunction of wealth, knowledge and goodness: wealth is nothing but as it is bestowed, and knowledge nothing but as it is communicated: they must therefore be imparted to others, and to whom could I now delight to impart them? Goodness affords the only comfort which can be enjoyed without a partner, and goodness may be practised in retirement."

"How far solitude may admit goodness, or advance it, I shall not," replied Imlac, "dispute at present. Remember the confession of the pious hermit. You will wish to return into the world, when the image of your companion has left your thoughts." "That time," said Nekayah, "will never come. The generous frankness, the modest obsequiousness,<sup>1</sup> and the faithful secrecy of my dear Pekuah, will always be more missed, as I shall live longer to see vice and folly."

"The state of a mind oppressed with a sudden calamity," said Imlac, "is like that of the fabulous inhabitants of the new created earth, who, when the first night came upon them, supposed that day never would return. When the clouds of sorrow gather over us, we see nothing beyond them, nor can imagine how they will be dispelled: yet a new day succeeded to the night, and sorrow is never long without a dawn of ease. But they who restrain themselves from receiving comfort, do as the savages would have done, had they put out their eyes when it was dark. Our minds, like our bodies, are in continual flux; something is hourly lost, and something acquired. To lose much at once is inconvenient to either, but while the vital powers remain uninjured, nature will find the means of reparation. Distance has the same effect on the mind as on the eye, and while we glide along the stream of time, whatever we leave behind us is always lessening, and that which we approach increasing in magnitude. Do not suffer life to stagnate; it will grow muddy for want of motion: commit yourself again to the current of the world; Pekuah will vanish by degrees; you will meet in your way some other favorite, or learn to diffuse yourself in general conversation."

"At least," said the prince, "do not despair before all remedies have been tried: the inquiry after the unfortunate lady is still continued, and shall be carried on with yet greater diligence, on condition that you will promise to wait a year for the event, without any unalterable resolution."

Nekayah thought this a reasonable demand, and made the promise to her brother, who had been advised by Imlac to require it. Imlac had, indeed, no great hope of regaining Pekuah, but he supposed, that if he could secure the interval of a year, the princess would be then in no danger of a cloister.

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Slacken.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Obedience.[Return to reference 1](#)

### **Chapter 36. Pekuah Is Still Remembered. The Progress of Sorrow**

Nekayah, seeing that nothing was omitted for the recovery of her favorite, and having, by her promise, set her intention of retirement at a distance, began imperceptibly to return to common cares and common pleasures. She rejoiced without her own consent at the suspension of her sorrows, and sometimes caught herself with indignation in the act of turning away her mind from the remembrance of her, whom yet she resolved never to forget.

She then appointed a certain hour of the day for meditation on the merits and fondness of Pekuah, and for some weeks retired constantly at the time fixed, and returned with her eyes swollen and her countenance clouded. By degrees she grew less scrupulous, and suffered any important and pressing avocation to delay the tribute of daily tears. She then yielded to less occasions; sometimes forgot what she was indeed afraid to remember, and, at last, wholly released herself from the duty of periodical affliction.

Her real love of Pekuah was yet not diminished. A thousand occurrences brought her back to memory, and a thousand wants, which nothing but the confidence of friendship can supply, made her frequently regretted. She, therefore, solicited Imlac never to desist from inquiry, and to leave no art of intelligence untried, that, at least, she might have the comfort of knowing that she did not suffer by negligence or sluggishness. "Yet what," said she, "is to be expected from our pursuit of happiness, when we find the state of life to be such, that happiness itself is the cause of misery? Why should we endeavor to attain that, of which the possession cannot be secured? I shall henceforward fear to yield my heart to excellence, however bright, or to fondness, however tender, lest I should lose again what I have lost in Pekuah."

### **Chapter 37. *The Princess Hears News of Pekuah***

In seven months, one of the messengers, who had been sent away upon the day when the promise was drawn from the princess, returned, after many unsuccessful rambles, from the borders of Nubia, with an account that Pekuah was in the hands of an Arab chief, who possessed a castle or fortress on the extremity of Egypt. The Arab, whose revenue was plunder, was willing to restore her, with her two attendants, for two hundred ounces of gold.

The price was no subject of debate. The princess was in ecstasies when she heard that her favorite was alive, and might so cheaply be ransomed. She could not think of delaying for a moment Pekuah's happiness or her own, but entreated her brother to send back the messenger with the sum required. Imlac, being consulted, was not very confident of the veracity of the relator, and was still more doubtful of the Arab's faith, who might, if he were too liberally trusted, detain at once the money and the captives. He thought it dangerous to put themselves in the power of the Arab, by going into his district, and could not expect that the rover<sup>2</sup> would so much expose himself as to come into the lower country, where he might be seized by the forces of the Bassa.

It is difficult to negotiate where neither will trust. But Imlac, after some deliberation, directed the messenger to propose that Pekuah should be conducted by ten horsemen to the monastery of St. Anthony, which is situated in the deserts of Upper Egypt, where she should be met by the same number, and her ransom should be paid.

That no time might be lost, as they expected that the proposal would not be refused, they immediately began their journey to the monastery; and, when they arrived, Imlac went forward with the former messenger to the Arab's fortress. Rasselas was desirous to go with them, but neither his sister nor Imlac would consent. The Arab, according to the custom of his nation, observed the laws of hospitality with great exactness to those who put themselves into his power, and, in a few days, brought Pekuah with her maids, by easy journeys, to their place appointed, where receiving the stipulated

price, he restored her with great respect to liberty and her friends, and undertook to conduct them back toward Cairo beyond all danger of robbery or violence.

The princess and her favorite embraced each other with transport too violent to be expressed, and went out together to pour the tears of tenderness in secret, and exchange professions of kindness and gratitude. After a few hours they returned into the refectory of the convent, where, in the presence of the prior and his brethren, the prince required of Pekuah the history of her adventures.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Robber.[Return to reference 2](#)

### **Chapter 38. The Adventures of the Lady Pekuah**

"At what time, and in what manner, I was forced away," said Pekuah, "your servants have told you. The suddenness of the event struck me with surprise, and I was at first rather stupified than agitated with any passion of either fear or sorrow. My confusion was increased by the speed and tumult of our flight while we were followed by the Turks, who, as it seemed, soon despaired to overtake us, or were afraid of those whom they made a show of menacing.

"When the Arabs saw themselves out of danger they slackened their course, and, as I was less harassed by external violence, I began to feel more uneasiness in my mind. After some time we stopped near a spring shaded with trees in a pleasant meadow, where we were set upon the ground, and offered such refreshments as our masters were partaking. I was suffered to sit with my maids apart from the rest, and none attempted to comfort or insult us. Here I first began to feel the full weight of my misery. The girls sat weeping in silence, and from time to time looked on me for succor. I knew not to what condition we were doomed, nor could conjecture where would be the place of our captivity, or whence to draw any hope of deliverance. I was in the hands of robbers and savages, and had no reason to suppose that their pity was more than their justice, or that they would forbear the gratification of any ardor of desire, or caprice of cruelty. I, however, kissed my maids, and endeavored to pacify them by remarking, that we were yet treated with decency, and that, since we were now carried beyond pursuit, there was no danger of violence to our lives.

"When we were to be set again on horseback, my maids clung round me, and refused to be parted, but I commanded them not to irritate those who had us in their power. We traveled the remaining part of the day through an unfrequented and pathless country, and came by moonlight to the side of a hill, where the rest of the troop was stationed. Their tents were pitched, and their fires kindled, and our chief was welcomed as a man much beloved by his dependents.



"We were received into a large tent, where we found women who had attended their husbands in the expedition. They set before us the supper which they had provided, and I eat it rather to encourage my maids than to comply with any appetite of my own. When the meat was taken away they spread the carpets for repose. I was weary, and hoped to find in sleep that remission of distress which nature seldom denies. Ordering myself therefore to be undressed, I observed that the women looked very earnestly upon me, not expecting, I suppose, to see me so submissively attended. When my upper vest was taken off, they were apparently struck with the splendor of my clothes, and one of them timorously laid her hand upon the embroidery. She then went out, and, in a short time, came back with another woman, who seemed to be of higher rank, and greater authority. She did, at her entrance, the usual act of reverence, and, taking me by the hand, placed me in a smaller tent, spread with finer carpets, where I spent the night quietly with my maids.

"In the morning, as I was sitting on the grass, the chief of the troop came towards me: I rose up to receive him, and he bowed with great respect. 'Illustrious lady,' said he, 'my fortune is better than I had presumed to hope; I am told by my women that I have a princess in my camp.' 'Sir,' answered I, 'your women have deceived themselves and you; I am not a princess, but an unhappy stranger who intended soon to have left this country, in which I am now to be imprisoned for ever.' 'Whoever, or whencesoever, you are,' returned the Arab, 'your dress, and that of your servants, show your rank to be high, and your wealth to be great. Why should you, who can so easily procure your ransom, think yourself in danger of perpetual captivity? The purpose of my incursions is to increase my riches, or more properly to gather tribute. The sons of Ishmael<sup>3</sup> are the natural and hereditary lords of this part of the continent, which is usurped by late invaders, and low-born tyrants, from whom we are compelled to take by the sword what is denied to justice. The violence of war admits no distinction; the lance that is lifted at guilt and power will sometimes fall on innocence and gentleness.'

“‘How little,’ said I, ‘did I expect that yesterday it should have fallen upon me.’

“‘Misfortunes,’ answered the Arab, ‘should always be expected. If the eye of hostility could learn reverence or pity, excellence like yours had been exempt from injury. But the angels of affliction spread their toils alike for the virtuous and the wicked, for the mighty and the mean. Do not be disconsolate; I am not one of the lawless and cruel rovers of the desert; I know the rules of civil life: I will fix your ransom, give a passport to your messenger, and perform my stipulation with nice punctuality.’<sup>4</sup>

“You will easily believe that I was pleased with his courtesy; and finding that his predominant passion was desire of money, I began now to think my danger less, for I knew that no sum would be thought too great for the release of Pekuah. I told him that he should have no reason to charge me with ingratitude, if I was used with kindness, and that any ransom, which could be expected for a maid of common rank, would be paid, but that he must not persist to rate me as a princess. He said, he would consider what he should demand, and then, smiling, bowed and retired.

“Soon after the women came about me, each contending to be more officious<sup>5</sup> than the other, and my maids themselves were served with reverence. We traveled onward by short journeys. On the fourth day the chief told me, that my ransom must be two hundred ounces of gold, which I not only promised him, but told him, that I would add fifty more, if I and my maids were honorably treated.

“I never knew the power of gold before. From that time I was the leader of the troop. The march of every day was longer or shorter as I commanded, and the tents were pitched where I chose to rest. We now had camels and other conveniencies for travel, my own women were always at my side, and I amused myself with observing the manners of the vagrant nations,<sup>6</sup> and with viewing remains of ancient edifices with which these deserted countries appear to have been, in some distant age, lavishly embellished.

“The chief of the band was a man far from illiterate: he was able to travel by the stars or the compass, and had marked in his erratic expeditions such places as are most worthy the notice of a passenger.<sup>7</sup> He observed to me, that buildings are always best preserved in places little frequented, and difficult of access: for, when once a country declines from its primitive splendor, the more inhabitants are left, the quicker ruin will be made. Walls supply stones more easily than quarries, and palaces and temples will be demolished to make stables of granite, and cottages of porphyry.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Arabs, who claim descent from Ishmael, a son of Abraham. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Scrupulous exactness. “Civil”: civilized. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ready to serve. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Nomads. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Traveler. [Return to reference 7](#)

### **Chapter 39. *The Adventures of Pekuah Continued***

"We wandered about in this manner for some weeks, whether, as our chief pretended, for my gratification, or, as I rather suspected, for some convenience of his own. I endeavored to appear contented where sullenness and resentment would have been of no use, and that endeavor conduced much to the calmness of my mind; but my heart was always with Nekayah, and the troubles of the night much overbalanced the amusements of the day. My women, who threw all their cares upon their mistress, set their minds at ease from the time when they saw me treated with respect, and gave themselves up to the incidental alleviations of our fatigue without solicitude or sorrow. I was pleased with their pleasure, and animated with their confidence. My condition had lost much of its terror, since I found that the Arab ranged the country merely to get riches. Avarice is an uniform and tractable vice: other intellectual distempers are different in different constitutions of mind; that which soothes the pride of one will offend the pride of another; but to the favor of the covetous there is a ready way, bring money and nothing is denied.

"At last we came to the dwelling of our chief, a strong and spacious house built with stone in an island of the Nile, which lies, as I was told, under the tropic. 'Lady,' said the Arab, 'you shall rest after your journey a few weeks in this place, where you are to consider yourself as sovereign. My occupation is war: I have therefore chosen this obscure residence, from which I can issue unexpected, and to which I can retire unpursued. You may now repose in security: here are few pleasures, but here is no danger.' He then led me into the inner apartments, and seating me on the richest couch, bowed to the ground. His women, who considered me as a rival, looked on me with malignity; but being soon informed that I was a great lady detained only for my ransom, they began to vie with each other in obsequiousness and reverence.

"Being again comforted with new assurances of speedy liberty, I was for some days diverted from impatience by the novelty of the place. The turrets overlooked the country to a great distance, and

afforded a view of many windings of the stream. In the day I wandered from one place to another as the course of the sun varied the splendor of the prospect, and saw many things which I had never seen before. The crocodiles and river-horses<sup>8</sup> are common in this unpeopled region, and I often looked upon them with terror, though I knew that they could not hurt me. For some time I expected to see mermaids and tritons, which, as Imlac has told me, the European travelers have stationed in the Nile, but no such beings ever appeared, and the Arab, when I inquired after them, laughed at my credulity.

"At night the Arab always attended me to a tower set apart for celestial observations, where he endeavored to teach me the names and courses of the stars. I had no great inclination to this study, but an appearance of attention was necessary to please my instructor, who valued himself for his skill, and, in a little while, I found some employment requisite to beguile the tediousness of time, which was to be passed always amidst the same objects. I was weary of looking in the morning on things from which I had turned away weary in the evening: I therefore was at last willing to observe the stars rather than do nothing, but could not always compose my thoughts, and was very often thinking on Nekayah when others imagined me contemplating the sky. Soon after the Arab went upon another expedition, and then my only pleasure was to talk with my maids about the accident by which we were carried away, and the happiness that we should all enjoy at the end of our captivity."

"There were women in your Arab's fortress," said the princess, "why did you not make them your companions, enjoy their conversation, and partake their diversions? In a place where they found business or amusement, why should you alone sit corroded with idle melancholy? or why could not you bear for a few months that condition to which they were condemned for life?"

"The diversions of the women," answered Pekuah, "were only childish play, by which the mind accustomed to stronger operations could not be kept busy. I could do all which they delighted in doing by powers merely sensitive,<sup>9</sup> while my intellectual faculties were

flown to Cairo. They ran from room to room as a bird hops from wire to wire in his cage. They danced for the sake of motion, as lambs frisk in a meadow. One sometimes pretended to be hurt that the rest might be alarmed, or hid herself that another might seek her. Part of their time passed in watching the progress of light bodies that floated on the river, and part in marking the various forms into which clouds broke in the sky.

"Their business was only needlework, in which I and my maids sometimes helped them; but you know that the mind will easily straggle from the fingers, nor will you suspect that captivity and absence from Nekayah could receive solace from silken flowers.

"Nor was much satisfaction to be hoped from their conversation: for of what could they be expected to talk? They had seen nothing; for they had lived from early youth in that narrow spot: of what they had not seen they could have no knowledge, for they could not read. They had no ideas but of the few things that were within their view, and had hardly names for anything but their clothes and their food. As I bore a superior character, I was often called to terminate their quarrels, which I decided as equitably as I could. If it could have amused me to hear the complaints of each against the rest, I might have been often detained by long stories, but the motives of their animosity were so small that I could not listen without intercepting the tale."

"How," said Rasselas, "can the Arab, whom you represented as a man of more than common accomplishments, take any pleasure in his seraglio, when it is filled only with women like these. Are they exquisitely beautiful?"

"They do not," said Pekuah, "want that unaffecting and ignoble beauty which may subsist without spriteliness or sublimity, without energy of thought or dignity of virtue. But to a man like the Arab such beauty was only a flower casually plucked and carelessly thrown away. Whatever pleasures he might find among them, they were not those of friendship or society. When they were playing about him he looked on them with inattentive superiority: when they vied for his regard he sometimes turned away disgusted. As they

had no knowledge, their talk could take nothing from the tediousness of life: as they had no choice, their fondness, or appearance of fondness, excited in him neither pride nor gratitude; he was not exalted in his own esteem by the smiles of a woman who saw no other man, nor was much obliged by that regard, of which he could never know the sincerity, and which he might often perceive to be exerted not so much to delight him as to pain a rival. That which he gave, and they received, as love, was only a careless distribution of superfluous time, such love as man can bestow upon that which he despises, such as has neither hope nor fear, neither joy nor sorrow."

"You have reason, lady, to think yourself happy," said Imlac, "that you have been thus easily dismissed. How could a mind, hungry for knowledge, be willing, in an intellectual famine, to lose such a banquet as Pekuah's conversation?"

"I am inclined to believe," answered Pekuah, "that he was for some time in suspense; for, notwithstanding his promise, whenever I proposed to dispatch a messenger to Cairo, he found some excuse for delay. While I was detained in his house he made many incursions into the neighboring countries, and, perhaps, he would have refused to discharge me, had his plunder been equal to his wishes. He returned always courteous, related his adventures, delighted to hear my observations, and endeavored to advance my acquaintance with the stars. When I importuned him to send away my letters, he soothed me with professions of honor and sincerity; and, when I could be no longer decently denied, put his troop again in motion, and left me to govern in his absence. I was much afflicted by this studied procrastination, and was sometimes afraid that I should be forgotten; that you would leave Cairo, and I must end my days in an island of the Nile.

"I grew at last hopeless and dejected, and cared so little to entertain him, that he for a while more frequently talked with my maids. That he should fall in love with them, or with me, might have been equally fatal, and I was not much pleased with the growing friendship. My anxiety was not long; for, as I recovered some degree

of cheerfulness, he returned to me, and I could not forbear to despise my former uneasiness.

“He still delayed to send for my ransom, and would, perhaps, never have determined, had not your agent found his way to him. The gold, which he would not fetch, he could not reject when it was offered. He hastened to prepare for our journey hither, like a man delivered from the pain of an intestine conflict. I took leave of my companions in the house, who dismissed me with cold indifference.”

Nekayah, having heard her favorite’s relation, rose and embraced her, and Rasselas gave her an hundred ounces of gold, which she presented to the Arab for the fifty that were promised.

## Endnotes

- Note 8: Hippopotamuses. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: “Having sense or perception, but not reason” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*). [Return to reference 9](#)



## **Chapter 40. *The History of a Man of Learning***

They returned to Cairo, and were so well pleased at finding themselves together, that none of them went much abroad. The prince began to love learning, and one day declared to Imlac, that he intended to devote himself to science,<sup>1</sup> and pass the rest of his days in literary solitude.

"Before you make your final choice," answered Imlac, "you ought to examine its hazards, and converse with some of those who are grown old in the company of themselves. I have just left the observatory of one of the most learned astronomers in the world, who has spent forty years in unwearied attention to the motions and appearances of the celestial bodies, and has drawn out his soul in endless calculations. He admits a few friends once a month to hear his deductions and enjoy his discoveries. I was introduced as a man of knowledge worthy of his notice. Men of various ideas and fluent conversation are commonly welcome to those whose thoughts have been long fixed upon a single point, and who find the images of other things stealing away. I delighted him with my remarks, he smiled at the narrative of my travels, and was glad to forget the constellations, and descend for a moment into the lower world.

"On the next day of vacation<sup>2</sup> I renewed my visit, and was so fortunate as to please him again. He relaxed from that time the severity of his rule, and permitted me to enter at my own choice. I found him always busy, and always glad to be relieved. As each knew much which the other was desirous of learning, we exchanged our notions with great delight. I perceived that I had every day more of his confidence, and always found new cause of admiration in the profundity of his mind. His comprehension is vast, his memory capacious and retentive, his discourse is methodical, and his expression clear.

"His integrity and benevolence are equal to his learning. His deepest researches and most favorite studies are willingly interrupted for any opportunity of doing good by his counsel or his riches. To his closest retreat,<sup>3</sup> at his most busy moments, all are

admitted that want his assistance: 'For though I exclude idleness and pleasure, I will never,' says he, 'bar my doors against charity. To man is permitted the contemplation of the skies, but the practice of virtue is commanded.' "

"Surely," said the princess, "this man is happy."

"I visited him," said Imlac, "with more and more frequency, and was every time more enamored of his conversation: he was sublime without haughtiness, courteous without formality, and communicative without ostentation. I was at first, great princess, of your opinion, thought him the happiest of mankind, and often congratulated him on the blessing that he enjoyed. He seemed to hear nothing with indifference but the praises of his condition, to which he always returned a general answer, and diverted the conversation to some other topic.

"Amidst this willingness to be pleased, and labor to please, I had quickly reason to imagine that some painful sentiment pressed upon his mind. He often looked up earnestly towards the sun, and let his voice fall in the midst of his discourse. He would sometimes, when we were alone, gaze upon me in silence with the air of a man who longed to speak what he was yet resolved to suppress. He would often send for me with vehement injunctions of haste, though, when I came to him, he had nothing extraordinary to say. And sometimes, when I was leaving him, he would call me back, pause a few moments and then dismiss me.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Knowledge.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Leisure.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Most secluded place of privacy.[Return to reference 3](#)

## **Chapter 41. *The Astronomer Discovers the Cause of His Uneasiness***

"At last the time came when the secret burst his reserve. We were sitting together last night in the turret of his house, watching the emersion of a satellite of Jupiter. A sudden tempest clouded the sky, and disappointed our observation. We sat a while silent in the dark, and then he addressed himself to me in these words: 'Imlac, I have long considered thy friendship as the greatest blessing of my life. Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful. I have found in thee all the qualities requisite for trust, benevolence, experience, and fortitude. I have long discharged an office which I must soon quit at the call of nature, and shall rejoice in the hour of imbecility<sup>4</sup> and pain to devolve it upon thee.'

"I thought myself honored by this testimony, and protested that whatever could conduce to his happiness would add likewise to mine.

"Hear, Imlac, what thou wilt not without difficulty credit. I have possessed for five years the regulation of weather, and the distribution of the seasons: the sun has listened to my dictates, and passed from tropic to tropic by my direction; the clouds, at my call, have poured their waters, and the Nile has overflowed at my command; I have restrained the rage of the dog-star, and mitigated the fervors of the crab.<sup>5</sup> The winds alone, of all the elemental powers, have hitherto refused my authority, and multitudes have perished by equinoctial tempests which I found myself unable to prohibit or restrain. I have administered this great office with exact justice, and made to the different nations of the earth an impartial dividend of rain and sunshine. What must have been the misery of half the globe, if I had limited the clouds to particular regions, or confined the sun to either side of the equator?'

## **Endnotes**

- Note 4: Feebleness.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The fourth sign of the zodiac (Cancer). "The dog-star": Sirius was supposed to cause the heat ("dog days") of summer.[Return to reference 5](#)

## **Chapter 42. *The Opinion of the Astronomer Is Explained and Justified***

"I suppose he discovered in me, through the obscurity of the room, some tokens of amazement and doubt, for, after a short pause, he proceeded thus:

"Not to be easily credited will neither surprise nor offend me; for I am, probably, the first of human beings to whom this trust has been imparted. Nor do I know whether to deem this distinction a reward or punishment; since I have possessed it I have been far less happy than before, and nothing but the consciousness of good intention could have enabled me to support the weariness of unremitted vigilance.'

"How long, Sir,' said I, 'has this great office been in your hands?'

"About ten years ago,' said he, 'my daily observations of the changes of the sky led me to consider, whether, if I had the power of the seasons, I could confer greater plenty upon the inhabitants of the earth. This contemplation fastened on my mind, and I sat days and nights in imaginary dominion, pouring upon this country and that the showers of fertility, and seconding every fall of rain with a due proportion of sunshine. I had yet only the will to do good, and did not imagine that I should ever have the power.

"One day as I was looking on the fields withering with heat, I felt in my mind a sudden wish that I could send rain on the southern mountains, and raise the Nile to an inundation. In the hurry of my imagination I commanded rain to fall, and, by comparing the time of my command, with that of the inundation, I found that the clouds had listened to my lips.'

"Might not some other cause,' said I, 'produce this concurrence? the Nile does not always rise on the same day.'

"Do not believe,' said he with impatience, 'that such objections could escape me: I reasoned long against my own conviction, and labored against truth with the utmost obstinacy. I sometimes suspected myself of madness, and should not have dared to impart

this secret but to a man like you, capable of distinguishing the wonderful from the impossible, and the incredible from the false.'

""Why, Sir,' said I, 'do you call that incredible, which you know, or think you know, to be true?'

""Because,' said he, 'I cannot prove it by any external evidence; and I know too well the laws of demonstration to think that my conviction ought to influence another, who cannot, like me, be conscious of its force. I therefore shall not attempt to gain credit by disputation. It is sufficient that I feel this power, that I have long possessed, and every day exerted it. But the life of man is short, the infirmities of age increase upon me, and the time will soon come when the regulator of the year must mingle with the dust. The care of appointing a successor has long disturbed me; the night and the day have been spent in comparisons of all the characters which have come to my knowledge, and I have yet found none so worthy as thyself.

### **Chapter 43. *The Astronomer Leaves Imlac His Directions***

“Hear therefore, what I shall impart, with attention, such as the welfare of a world requires. If the task of a king be considered as difficult, who has the care only of a few millions, to whom he cannot do much good or harm, what must be the anxiety of him, on whom depends the action of the elements, and the great gifts of light and heat!—Hear me therefore with attention.

“I have diligently considered the position of the earth and sun, and formed innumerable schemes in which I changed their situation. I have sometimes turned aside the axis of the earth, and sometimes varied the ecliptic of the sun: but I have found it impossible to make a disposition by which the world may be advantaged; what one region gains, another loses by any imaginable alteration, even without considering the distant parts of the solar system with which we are unacquainted. Do not, therefore, in thy administration of the year, indulge thy pride by innovation; do not please thyself with thinking that thou canst make thyself renowned to all future ages, by disordering the seasons. The memory of mischief is no desirable fame. Much less will it become thee to let kindness or interest prevail. Never rob other countries of rain to pour it on thine own. For us the Nile is sufficient.’

“I promised that when I possessed the power, I would use it with inflexible integrity, and he dismissed me, pressing my hand. ‘My heart,’ said he, ‘will be now at rest, and my benevolence will no more destroy my quiet: I have found a man of wisdom and virtue, to whom I can cheerfully bequeath the inheritance of the sun.’”

The prince heard this narration with very serious regard, but the princess smiled, and Pekuah convulsed herself with laughter.

“Ladies,” said Imlac, “to mock the heaviest of human afflictions is neither charitable nor wise. Few can attain this man’s knowledge, and few practice his virtues; but all may suffer his calamity. Of the uncertainties of our present state, the most dreadful and alarming is the uncertain continuance of reason.”

The princess was recollected, and the favorite was abashed. Rasselas, more deeply affected, inquired of Imlac, whether he thought such maladies of the mind frequent, and how they were contracted.



#### **Chapter 44. *The Dangerous Prevalence<sup>6</sup> of Imagination***

"Disorders of intellect," answered Imlac, "happen much more often than superficial observers will easily believe. Perhaps, if we speak with rigorous exactness, no human mind is in its right state. There is no man whose imagination does not sometimes predominate over his reason, who can regulate his attention wholly by his will, and whose ideas will come and go at his command. No man will be found in whose mind airy notions do not sometimes tyrannize, and force him to hope or fear beyond the limits of sober probability. All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity; but while this power is such as we can control and repress, it is not visible to others, nor considered as any depravation of the mental faculties; it is not pronounced madness but when it comes ungovernable, and apparently influences speech or action.

"To indulge the power of fiction, and send imagination out upon the wing, is often the sport of those who delight too much in silent speculation. When we are alone we are not always busy; the labor of excogitation is too violent to last long; the ardor of inquiry will sometimes give way to idleness or satiety. He who has nothing external that can divert him must find pleasure in his own thoughts, and must conceive himself what he is not; for who is pleased with what he is? He then expatiates in boundless futurity, and culls from all imaginable conditions that which for the present moment he should most desire, amuses his desires with impossible enjoyments, and confers upon his pride unattainable dominion. The mind dances from scene to scene, unites all pleasures in all combinations, and riots in delights which nature and fortune, with all their bounty, cannot bestow.

"In time, some particular train of ideas fixes the attention; all other intellectual gratifications are rejected; the mind, in weariness or leisure, recurs constantly to the favorite conception, and feasts on the luscious falsehood, whenever she is offended with the bitterness of truth. By degrees the reign of fancy is confirmed; she grows first imperious, and in time despotic. Then fictions begin to operate as

realities, false opinions fasten upon the mind, and life passes in dreams of rapture or of anguish.

"This, sir, is one of the dangers of solitude, which the hermit has confessed not always to promote goodness, and the astronomer's misery has proved to be not always propitious to wisdom."

"I will no more," said the favorite, "imagine myself the queen of Abyssinia. I have often spent the hours which the princess gave to my own disposal, in adjusting ceremonies and regulating the court; I have repressed the pride of the powerful, and granted the petitions of the poor; I have built new palaces in more happy situations, planted groves upon the tops of mountains, and have exulted in the beneficence of royalty, till, when the princess entered, I had almost forgotten to bow down before her."

"And I," said the princess, "will not allow myself any more to play the shepherdess in my waking dreams. I have often soothed my thoughts with the quiet and innocence of pastoral employments, till I have in my chamber heard the winds whistle, and the sheep bleat; sometimes freed the lamb entangled in the thicket, and sometimes with my crook encountered the wolf. I have a dress like that of the village maids, which I put on to help my imagination, and a pipe on which I play softly, and suppose myself followed by my flocks."

"I will confess," said the prince, "an indulgence of fantastic delight more dangerous than yours. I have frequently endeavored to image the possibility of a perfect government, by which all wrong should be restrained, all vice reformed, and all the subjects preserved in tranquility and innocence. This thought produced innumerable schemes of reformation, and dictated many useful regulations and salutary edicts. This has been the sport, and sometimes the labor, of my solitude; and I start, when I think with how little anguish I once supposed the death of my father and my brothers."

"Such," says Imlac, "are the effects of visionary schemes; when we first form them, we know them to be absurd, but familiarize them by degrees, and in time lose sight of their folly."

## Endnotes

- Note 6: Predominance. [Return to reference 6](#)

### **Chapter 45. *They Discourse with an Old Man***

The evening was now far past, and they rose to return home. As they walked along the bank of the Nile, delighted with the beams of the moon quivering on the water, they saw at a small distance an old man, whom the prince had often heard in the assembly of the sages. "Yonder," said he, "is one whose years have calmed his passions, but not clouded his reason. Let us close the disquisitions of the night by inquiring what are his sentiments of his own state, that we may know whether youth alone is to struggle with vexation, and whether any better hope remains for the latter part of life."

Here the sage approached and saluted them. They invited him to join their walk, and prattled a while, as acquaintance that had unexpectedly met one another. The old man was cheerful and talkative, and the way seemed short in his company. He was pleased to find himself not disregarded, accompanied them to their house, and, at the prince's request, entered with them. They placed him in the seat of honor, and set wine and conserves before him.

"Sir," said the princess, "an evening walk must give to a man of learning like you pleasures which ignorance and youth can hardly conceive. You know the qualities and the causes of all that you behold, the laws by which the river flows, the periods in which the planets perform their revolutions. Everything must supply you with contemplation, and renew the consciousness of your own dignity."

"Lady," answered he, "let the gay and the vigorous expect pleasure in their excursions; it is enough that age can obtain ease. To me the world has lost its novelty; I look round, and see what I remember to have seen in happier days. I rest against a tree, and consider that in the same shade I once disputed upon the annual overflow of the Nile with a friend who is now silent in the grave. I cast my eyes upward, fix them on the changing moon, and think with pain on the vicissitudes of life. I have ceased to take much delight in physical truth; for what have I to do with those things which I am soon to leave?"

"You may at least recreate<sup>7</sup> yourself," said Imlac, "with the recollection of an honorable and useful life, and enjoy the praise which all agree to give you."

"Praise," said the sage with a sigh, "is to an old man an empty sound. I have neither mother to be delighted with the reputation of her son, nor wife to partake the honors of her husband. I have outlived my friends and my rivals. Nothing is now of much importance; for I cannot extend my interest beyond myself. Youth is delighted with applause, because it is considered as the earnest of some future good, and because the prospect of life is far extended; but to me, who am now declining to decrepitude, there is little to be feared from the malevolence of men, and yet less to be hoped from their affection or esteem. Something they may yet take away, but they can give me nothing. Riches would now be useless, and high employment would be pain. My retrospect of life recalls to my view many opportunities of good neglected, much time squandered upon trifles, and more lost in idleness and vacancy. I leave many great designs unattempted, and many great attempts unfinished. My mind is burthened with no heavy crime, and therefore I compose myself to tranquility; endeavor to abstract my thoughts from hopes and cares which, though reason knows them to be vain, still try to keep their old possession of the heart; expect,<sup>8</sup> with serene humility, that hour which nature cannot long delay; and hope to possess, in a better state, that happiness which here I could not find, and that virtue which here I have not attained."

He arose and went away, leaving his audience not much elated with the hope of long life. The prince consoled himself with remarking that it was not reasonable to be disappointed by this account; for age had never been considered as the season of felicity, and if it was possible to be easy in decline and weakness, it was likely that the days of vigor and alacrity might be happy; that the noon of life might be bright, if the evening could be calm.

The princess suspected that age was querulous and malignant, and delighted to repress the expectations of those who had newly entered the world. She had seen the possessors of estates look with

envy on their heirs, and known many who enjoy pleasure no longer than they can confine it to themselves.

Pekuah conjectured that the man was older than he appeared, and was willing to impute his complaints to delirious dejection; or else supposed that he had been unfortunate, and was therefore discontented. "For nothing," said she, "is more common than to call our own condition the condition of life."

Imlac, who had no desire to see them depressed, smiled at the comforts which they could so readily procure to themselves, and remembered that, at the same age, he was equally confident of unmingled prosperity, and equally fertile of consolatory expedients. He forbore to force upon them unwelcome knowledge, which time itself would too soon impress. The princess and her lady retired; the madness of the astronomer hung upon their minds, and they desired Imlac to enter upon his office, and delay next morning the rising of the sun.

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Refresh.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Await.[Return to reference 8](#)

## **Chapter 46. *The Princess and Pekuah Visit the Astronomer***

The princess and Pekuah, having talked in private of Imlac's astronomer, thought his character at once so amiable and so strange, that they could not be satisfied without a nearer knowledge, and Imlac was requested to find the means of bringing them together.

This was somewhat difficult; the philosopher had never received any visits from women, though he lived in a city that had in it many Europeans who followed the manners of their own countries, and many from other parts of the world that lived there with European liberty. The ladies would not be refused, and several schemes were proposed for the accomplishment of their design. It was proposed to introduce them as strangers in distress, to whom the sage was always accessible; but, after some deliberation, it appeared, that by this artifice, no acquaintance could be formed, for their conversation would be short, and they could not decently importune him often. "This," said Rasselas, "is true; but I have yet a stronger objection against the misrepresentation of your state. I have always considered it as treason against the great republic of human nature, to make any man's virtues the means of deceiving him, whether on great or little occasions. All imposture weakens confidence and chills benevolence. When the sage finds that you are not what you seemed, he will feel the resentment natural to a man who, conscious of great abilities, discovers that he has been tricked by understandings meaner than his own, and, perhaps, the distrust, which he can never afterwards wholly lay aside, may stop the voice of counsel, and close the hand of charity; and where will you find the power of restoring his benefactions to mankind, or his peace to himself?"

To this no reply was attempted, and Imlac began to hope that their curiosity would subside; but next day Pekuah told him, she had now found an honest pretense for a visit to the astronomer, for she would solicit permission to continue under him the studies in which she had been initiated by the Arab, and the princess might go with

her either as a fellow-student, or because a woman could not decently come alone. "I am afraid," said Imlac, "that he will be soon weary of your company: men advanced far in knowledge do not love to repeat the elements of their art, and I am not certain, that even of the elements, as he will deliver them connected with inferences, and mingled with reflections, you are a very capable auditress." "That," said Pekuah, "must be my care: I ask of you only to take me thither. My knowledge is, perhaps, more than you imagine it, and by concurring always with his opinions I shall make him think it greater than it is."

The astronomer, in pursuance of this resolution, was told, that a foreign lady, traveling in search of knowledge, had heard of his reputation, and was desirous to become his scholar. The uncommonness of the proposal raised at once his surprise and curiosity, and when, after a short deliberation, he consented to admit her, he could not stay without impatience till the next day.

The ladies dressed themselves magnificently, and were attended by Imlac to the astronomer, who was pleased to see himself approached with respect by persons of so splendid an appearance. In the exchange of the first civilities he was timorous and bashful; but when the talk became regular, he recollected his powers, and justified the character which Imlac had given. Inquiring of Pekuah what could have turned her inclination towards astronomy, he received from her a history of her adventure at the pyramid, and of the time passed in the Arab's island. She told her tale with ease and elegance, and her conversation took possession of his heart. The discourse was then turned to astronomy: Pekuah displayed what she knew: he looked upon her as a prodigy of genius, and entreated her not to desist from a study which she had so happily begun.

They came again and again, and were every time more welcome than before. The sage endeavored to amuse them, that they might prolong their visits, for he found his thoughts grow brighter in their company; the clouds of solicitude vanished by degrees, as he forced himself to entertain them, and he grieved when he was left at their departure to his old employment of regulating the seasons.



The princess and her favorite had now watched his lips for several months, and could not catch a single word from which they could judge whether he continued, or not, in the opinion of his preternatural commission. They often contrived to bring him to an open declaration, but he easily eluded all their attacks, and on which side soever they pressed him escaped from them to some other topic.

As their familiarity increased they invited him often to the house of Imlac, where they distinguished him by extraordinary respect. He began gradually to delight in sublunary pleasures. He came early and departed late; labored to recommend himself by assiduity and compliance; excited their curiosity after new arts, that they might still want his assistance; and when they made any excursion of pleasure or inquiry, entreated to attend them.

By long experience of his integrity and wisdom, the prince and his sister were convinced that he might be trusted without danger; and lest he should draw any false hopes from the civilities which he received, discovered to him their condition, with the motives of their journey, and required his opinion on the choice of life.

"Of the various conditions which the world spreads before you, which you shall prefer," said the sage, "I am not able to instruct you. I can only tell that I have chosen wrong. I have passed my time in study without experience; in the attainment of sciences which can, for the most part, be but remotely useful to mankind. I have purchased knowledge at the expense of all the common comforts of life: I have missed the endearing elegance of female friendship, and the happy commerce of domestic tenderness. If I have obtained any prerogatives above other students, they have been accompanied with fear, disquiet, and scrupulosity; but even of these prerogatives, whatever they were, I have, since my thoughts have been diversified by more intercourse with the world, begun to question the reality. When I have been for a few days lost in pleasing dissipation, I am always tempted to think that my inquiries have ended in error, and that I have suffered much, and suffered it in vain."

Imlac was delighted to find that the sage's understanding was breaking through its mists, and resolved to detain him from the planets till he should forget his task of ruling them, and reason should recover its original influence.

From this time the astronomer was received into familiar friendship, and partook of all their projects and pleasures: his respect kept him attentive, and the activity of Rasselas did not leave much time unengaged. Something was always to be done; the day was spent in making observations which furnished talk for the evening, and the evening was closed with a scheme for the morrow.

The sage confessed to Imlac, that since he had mingled in the gay tumults of life, and divided his hours by a succession of amusements, he found the conviction of his authority over the skies fade gradually from his mind, and began to trust less to an opinion which he never could prove to others, and which he now found subject to variation from causes in which reason had no part. "If I am accidentally left alone for a few hours," said he, "my inveterate persuasion rushes upon my soul, and my thoughts are chained down by some irresistible violence, but they are soon disentangled by the prince's conversation, and instantaneously released at the entrance of Pekuah. I am like a man habitually afraid of specters, who is set at ease by a lamp, and wonders at the dread which harassed him in the dark, yet, if his lamp be extinguished, feels again the terrors which he knows that when it is light he shall feel no more. But I am sometimes afraid lest I indulge my quiet by criminal negligence, and voluntarily forget the great charge with which I am entrusted. If I favor myself in a known error, or am determined by my own ease in a doubtful question of this importance, how dreadful is my crime!"

"No disease of the imagination," answered Imlac, "is so difficult of cure, as that which is complicated with the dread of guilt: fancy and conscience then act interchangeably upon us, and so often shift their places, that the illusions of one are not distinguished from the dictates of the other. If fancy presents images not moral or religious, the mind drives them away when they give it pain, but when melancholic<sup>9</sup> notions take the form of duty, they lay hold on the

faculties without opposition, because we are afraid to exclude or banish them. For this reason the superstitious are often melancholy, and the melancholy almost always superstitious.

“But do not let the suggestions of timidity overpower your better reason: the danger of neglect can be but as the probability of the obligation, which, when you consider it with freedom, you find very little, and that little growing every day less. Open your heart to the influence of the light, which, from time to time, breaks in upon you: when scruples importune you, which you in your lucid moments know to be vain, do not stand to parley, but fly to business or to Pekuah, and keep this thought always prevalent, that you are only one atom of the mass of humanity, and have neither such virtue nor vice, as that you should be singled out for supernatural favors or afflictions.”

## Endnotes

- Note 9: Obsessive. According to Johnson’s *Dictionary*, one definition of melancholy is “a kind of madness in which the mind is always fixed on one object.”[Return to reference 9](#)

## **Chapter 47. The Prince Enters, and Brings a New Topic**

"All this," said the astronomer, "I have often thought, but my reason has been so long subjugated by an uncontrollable and overwhelming idea, that it durst not confide in its own decisions. I now see how fatally I betrayed my quiet, by suffering chimeras to prey upon me in secret; but melancholy shrinks from communication, and I never found a man before, to whom I could impart my troubles, though I had been certain of relief. I rejoice to find my own sentiments confirmed by yours, who are not easily deceived, and can have no motive or purpose to deceive. I hope that time and variety will dissipate the gloom that has so long surrounded me, and the latter part of my days will be spent in peace."

"Your learning and virtue," said Imlac, "may justly give you hopes."

Rasselas then entered with the princess and Pekuah, and inquired whether they had contrived any new diversion for the next day. "Such," said Nekayah, "is the state of life, that none are happy but by the anticipation of change: the change itself is nothing; when we have made it, the next wish is to change again. The world is not yet exhausted; let me see something tomorrow which I never saw before."

"Variety," said Rasselas, "is so necessary to content, that even the happy valley disgusted me by the recurrence of its luxuries; yet I could not forbear to reproach myself with impatience, when I saw the monks of St. Anthony support without complaint, a life, not of uniform delight, but uniform hardship."

"Those men," answered Imlac, "are less wretched in their silent convent than the Abyssinian princes in their prison of pleasure. Whatever is done by the monks is incited by an adequate and reasonable motive. Their labor supplies them with necessaries; it therefore cannot be omitted, and is certainly rewarded. Their devotion prepares them for another state, and reminds them of its approach, while it fits them for it. Their time is regularly distributed; one duty succeeds another, so that they are not left open to the

distraction of unguided choice, nor lost in the shades of listless inactivity. There is a certain task to be performed at an appropriated hour; and their toils are cheerful, because they consider them as acts of piety, by which they are always advancing towards endless felicity."

"Do you think," said Nekayah, "that the monastic rule is a more holy and less imperfect state than any other? May not he equally hope for future happiness who converses openly with mankind, who succors the distressed by his charity, instructs the ignorant by his learning, and contributes by his industry to the general system of life; even though he should omit some of the mortifications which are practiced in the cloister, and allow himself such harmless delights as his condition may place within his reach?"

"This," said Imlac, "is a question which has long divided the wise, and perplexed the good. I am afraid to decide on either part. He that lives well in the world is better than he that lives well in a monastery. But perhaps everyone is not able to stem the temptations of public life; and if he cannot conquer, he may properly retreat. Some have little power to do good, and have likewise little strength to resist evil. Many are weary of their conflicts with adversity, and are willing to eject those passions which have long busied them in vain. And many are dismissed by age and diseases from the more laborious duties of society. In monasteries the weak and timorous may be happily sheltered, the weary may repose, and the penitent may meditate. Those retreats of prayer and contemplation have something so congenial to the mind of man, that, perhaps, there is scarcely one that does not purpose to close his life in pious abstraction with a few associates serious as himself."

"Such," said Pekuah, "has often been my wish, and I have heard the princess declare, that she should not willingly die in a crowd."

"The liberty of using harmless pleasures," proceeded Imlac, "will not be disputed; but it is still to be examined what pleasures are harmless. The evil of any pleasure that Nekayah can image is not in the act itself, but in its consequences. Pleasure, in itself harmless, may become mischievous, by endearing to us a state which we

know to be transient and probatory,<sup>1</sup> and withdrawing our thoughts from that, of which every hour brings us nearer to the beginning, and of which no length of time will bring us to the end. Mortification is not virtuous in itself, nor has any other use, but that it disengages us from the allurements of sense. In the state of future perfection, to which we all aspire, there will be pleasure without danger, and security without restraint."

The princess was silent, and Rasselas, turning to the astronomer, asked him, whether he could not delay her retreat, by showing her something which she had not seen before.

"Your curiosity," said the sage, "has been so general, and your pursuit of knowledge so vigorous, that novelties are not now very easily to be found: but what you can no longer procure from the living may be given by the dead. Among the wonders of this country are the catacombs, or the ancient repositories, in which the bodies of the earliest generations were lodged, and where, by the virtue of the gums which embalmed them, they yet remain without corruption."

"I know not," said Rasselas, "what pleasure the sight of the catacombs can afford; but, since nothing else is offered, I am resolved to view them, and shall place this with many other things which I have done, because I would do something."

They hired a guard of horsemen, and the next day visited the catacombs. When they were about to descend into the sepulchral caves, "Pekuah," said the princess, "we are now again invading the habitations of the dead; I know that you will stay behind; let me find you safe when I return." "No, I will not be left," answered Pekuah; "I will go down between you and the prince."

They then all descended, and roved with wonder through the labyrinth of subterraneous passages, where the bodies were laid in rows on either side.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Serving as a trial or test.[Return to reference 1](#)

### **Chapter 48. *Imlac Discourses on the Nature of the Soul***

"What reason," said the prince, "can be given, why the Egyptians should thus expensively preserve those carcasses which some nations consume with fire, others lay to mingle with the earth, and all agree to remove from their sight, as soon as decent rites can be performed?"

"The original of ancient customs," said Imlac, "is commonly unknown; for the practice often continues when the cause has ceased; and concerning superstitious ceremonies it is vain to conjecture; for what reason did not dictate reason cannot explain. I have long believed that the practice of embalming arose only from tenderness to the remains of relations or friends, and to this opinion I am more inclined, because it seems impossible that this care should have been general: had all the dead been embalmed, their repositories must in time have been more spacious than the dwellings of the living. I suppose only the rich or honorable were secured from corruption, and the rest left to the course of nature.

"But it is commonly supposed that the Egyptians believed the soul to live as long as the body continued undissolved, and therefore tried this method of eluding death."

"Could the wise Egyptians," said Nekayah, "think so grossly of the soul? If the soul could once survive its separation, what could it afterwards receive or suffer from the body?"

"The Egyptians would doubtless think erroneously," said the astronomer, "in the darkness of heathenism, and the first dawn of philosophy. The nature of the soul is still disputed amidst all our opportunities of clearer knowledge: some yet say, that it may be material, who, nevertheless, believe it to be immortal."

"Some," answered Imlac, "have indeed said that the soul is material, but I can scarcely believe that any man has thought it, who knew how to think; for all the conclusions of reason enforce the immateriality of mind, and all the notices of sense and investigations of science concur to prove the unconsciousness of matter.

"It was never supposed that cogitation is inherent in matter, or that every particle is a thinking being. Yet if any part of matter be devoid of thought, what part can we suppose to think? Matter can differ from matter only in form, density, bulk, motion, and direction of motion: to which of these, however varied or combined, can consciousness be annexed? To be round or square, to be solid or fluid, to be great or little, to be moved slowly or swiftly one way or another, are modes of material existence, all equally alien from the nature of cogitation. If matter be once without thought, it can only be made to think by some new modification, but all the modifications which it can admit are equally unconnected with cogitative powers."

"But the materialists," said the astronomer, "urge that matter may have qualities with which we are unacquainted."

"He who will determine," returned Imlac, "against that which he knows, because there may be something which he knows not; he that can set hypothetical possibility against acknowledged certainty, is not to be admitted among reasonable beings. All that we know of matter is, that matter is inert, senseless and lifeless; and if this conviction cannot be opposed but by referring us to something that we know not, we have all the evidence that human intellect can admit. If that which is known may be overruled by that which is unknown, no being, not omniscient, can arrive at certainty."

"Yet let us not," said the astronomer, "too arrogantly limit the Creator's power."

"It is no limitation of omnipotence," replied the poet, "to suppose that one thing is not consistent with another, that the same proposition cannot be at once true and false, that the same number cannot be even and odd, that cogitation cannot be conferred on that which is created incapable of cogitation."

"I know not," said Nekayah, "any great use of this question. Does that immateriality, which, in my opinion, you have sufficiently proved, necessarily include eternal duration?"

"Of immateriality," said Imlac, "our ideas are negative, and therefore obscure. Immateriality seems to imply a natural power of



perpetual duration as a consequence of exemption from all causes of decay: whatever perishes, is destroyed by the solution of its contexture,<sup>2</sup> and separation of its parts; nor can we conceive how that which has no parts, and therefore admits no solution, can be naturally corrupted or impaired."

"I know not," said Rasselas, "how to conceive anything without extension: what is extended must have parts, and you allow, that whatever has parts may be destroyed."

"Consider your own conceptions," replied Imlac, "and the difficulty will be less. You will find substance without extension. An ideal form is no less real than material bulk: yet an ideal form has no extension. It is no less certain, when you think on a pyramid, that your mind possesses the idea of a pyramid, than that the pyramid itself is standing. What space does the idea of a pyramid occupy more than the idea of a grain of corn? or how can either idea suffer laceration? As is the effect such is the cause; as thought is, such is the power that thinks; a power impassive and indiscerptible."<sup>3</sup>

"But the Being," said Nekayah, "whom I fear to name, the Being which made the soul, can destroy it."

"He, surely, can destroy it," answered Imlac, "since, however unperishable, it receives from a superior nature its power of duration. That it will not perish by any inherent cause of decay, or principle of corruption, may be shown by philosophy; but philosophy can tell no more. That it will not be annihilated by him that made it, we must humbly learn from higher authority."

The whole assembly stood a while silent and collected. "Let us return," said Rasselas, "from this scene of mortality. How gloomy would be these mansions of the dead to him who did not know that he shall never die; that what now acts shall continue its agency, and what now thinks shall think on for ever. Those that lie here stretched before us, the wise and the powerful of ancient times, warn us to remember the shortness of our present state: they were, perhaps, snatched away while they were busy, like us, in the choice of life."

"To me," said the princess, "the choice of life is become less important; I hope hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity."

They then hastened out of the caverns, and, under the protection of their guard, returned to Cairo.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Dissolution of its structure.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Not to be separated.[Return to reference 3](#)

## **Chapter 49. *The Conclusion, in Which Nothing Is Concluded***

It was now the time of the inundation of the Nile: a few days after their visit to the catacombs, the river began to rise.

They were confined to their house. The whole region being under water gave them no invitation to any excursions, and being well supplied with materials for talk, they diverted themselves with comparisons of the different forms of life which they had observed, and with various schemes of happiness which each of them had formed.

Pekuah was never so much charmed with any place as the convent of St. Anthony, where the Arab restored her to the princess, and wished only to fill it with pious maidens, and to be made prioress of the order; she was weary of expectation and disgust,<sup>4</sup> and would gladly be fixed in some unvariable state.

The princess thought that, of all sublunary things, knowledge was the best: she desired first to learn all sciences, and then purposed to found a college of learned women, in which she would preside, that, by conversing with the old and educating the young, she might divide her time between the acquisition and communication of wisdom, and raise up for the next age models of prudence, and patterns of piety.

The prince desired a little kingdom, in which he might administer justice in his own person, and see all the parts of government with his own eyes; but he could never fix the limits of his dominion, and was always adding to the number of his subjects.

Imlac and the astronomer were contented to be driven along the stream of life, without directing their course to any particular port.

Of these wishes that they had formed, they well knew that none could be obtained. They deliberated a while what was to be done, and resolved, when the inundation should cease, to return to Abyssinia.<sup>5</sup>

- Note 4: Aversion.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Their destination is their home country, but the text does not say whether they will return to the Happy Valley.[Return to reference 5](#)

**A Dictionary of the English Language** Before Johnson, no standard dictionary of the English language existed. The lack had troubled speakers of English for some time, both because Italian and French academies had produced major dictionaries of their own tongues and because, in the absence of any authority, English seemed likely to change utterly from one generation to another. Many eighteenth-century authors feared that their own language would soon become obsolete: as Alexander Pope wrote in *An Essay on Criticism*,

Our sons their fathers' failing language see,  
And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be.

A dictionary could help slow such change, and commercially it would be a book that everyone would need to buy. In 1746 a group of London publishers commissioned Johnson, still an unknown author, to undertake the project. He hoped to finish it in three years; it took him nine. But the quantity and quality of work he accomplished, aided only by six part-time assistants, made him famous as "Dictionary Johnson." The *Dictionary* remained a standard reference book for one hundred years.

Johnson's achievement is notable in three respects: its size (forty thousand words), the wealth of illustrative quotations, and the excellence of the definitions. No earlier English dictionary rivaled the scope of Johnson's two large folio volumes. About 114,000 quotations, gathered from the best English writers from Sidney to the eighteenth century, exemplify the usage of words as well as their meanings. Above all, it was the definitions, however, that established the authority of Johnson's *Dictionary*. A small selection is only too likely to concentrate on a few amusing or notorious definitions, but the great majority are full, clear, and totally free from eccentricity. Indeed, many of them are still repeated in modern dictionaries. Language, Johnson knew, cannot be fixed once and for all; many of the words he defines have radically changed meaning since the

eighteenth century. Yet Johnson did more than any other person of his time to preserve the ideal of a standard English.

# ***From A Dictionary of the English Language***

## ***From Preface***

\* \* \*

A large work is difficult because it is large, even though all its parts might singly be performed with facility; where there are many things to be done, each must be allowed its share of time and labor, in the proportion only which it bears to the whole; nor can it be expected that the stones which form the dome of a temple should be squared and polished like the diamond of a ring.

Of the event of this work, for which, having labored it with so much application, I cannot but have some degree of parental fondness, it is natural to form conjectures. Those who have been persuaded to think well of my design will require that it should fix our language, and put a stop to those alterations which time and chance have hitherto been suffered to make in it without opposition. With this consequence I will confess that I flattered myself for a while;<sup>1</sup> but now begin to fear that I have indulged expectation which neither reason nor experience can justify. When we see men grow old and die at a certain time one after another, from century to century, we laugh at the elixir that promises to prolong life to a thousand years; and with equal justice may the lexicographer be derided, who being able to produce no example of a nation that has preserved their words and phrases from mutability, shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language and secure it from corruption and decay, that it is in his power to change sublunary nature, or clear the world at once from folly, vanity, and affectation.

With this hope, however, academies have been instituted, to guard the avenues of their languages, to retain fugitives, and repulse intruders; but their vigilance and activity have hitherto been vain; sounds are too volatile and subtle for legal restraints; to

enchain syllables, and to lash the wind, are equally the undertakings of pride, unwilling to measure its desires by its strength. The French language has visibly changed under the inspection of the academy;<sup>2</sup> the style of Amelot's translation of father Paul is observed by Le Courayer to be *un peu passé*;<sup>3</sup> and no Italian will maintain that the diction of any modern writer is not perceptibly different from that of Boccace, Machiavel, or Caro.<sup>4</sup>

Total and sudden transformations of a language seldom happen; conquests and migrations are now very rare: but there are other causes of change, which, though slow in their operation, and invisible in their progress, are perhaps as much superior to human resistance as the revolutions of the sky, or intumescence<sup>5</sup> of the tide. Commerce, however necessary, however lucrative, as it depraves the manners, corrupts the language; they that have frequent intercourse with strangers, to whom they endeavor to accommodate themselves, must in time learn a mingled dialect, like the jargon which serves the traffickers<sup>6</sup> on the Mediterranean and Indian coasts. This will not always be confined to the exchange, the warehouse, or the port, but will be communicated by degrees to other ranks of the people, and be at last incorporated with the current speech.

There are likewise internal causes equally forcible. The language most likely to continue long without alteration would be that of a nation raised a little, and but a little, above barbarity, secluded from strangers, and totally employed in procuring the conveniencies of life; either without books, or, like some of the Mahometan countries, with very few: men thus busied and unlearned, having only such words as common use requires, would perhaps long continue to express the same notions by the same signs. But no such constancy can be expected in a people polished by arts, and classed by subordination, where one part of the community is sustained and accommodated by the labor of the other. Those who have much leisure to think, will always be enlarging the stock of ideas, and every increase of knowledge, whether real or fancied, will produce new words, or combinations of words. When the mind is unchained



from necessity, it will range after convenience; when it is left at large in the fields of speculation, it will shift opinions; as any custom is disused, the words that expressed it must perish with it; as any opinion grows popular, it will innovate speech in the same proportion as it alters practice.

As by the cultivation of various sciences, a language is amplified, it will be more furnished with words deflected from their original sense; the geometrician will talk of a courtier's zenith, or the eccentric virtue of a wild hero, and the physician of sanguine expectations and phlegmatic delays.<sup>7</sup> Copiousness of speech will give opportunities to capricious choice, by which some words will be preferred, and others degraded; vicissitudes of fashion will enforce the use of new, or extend the signification of known terms. The tropes<sup>8</sup> of poetry will make hourly encroachments, and the metaphorical will become the current sense: pronunciation will be varied by levity or ignorance, and the pen must at length comply with the tongue; illiterate writers will at one time or other, by public infatuation, rise into renown, who, not knowing the original import of words, will use them with colloquial licentiousness, confound distinction, and forget propriety. As politeness increases, some expressions will be considered as too gross and vulgar for the delicate, others as too formal and ceremonious for the gay and airy; new phrases are therefore adopted, which must, for the same reasons, be in time dismissed. Swift, in his petty treatise on the English language,<sup>9</sup> allows that new words must sometimes be introduced, but proposes that none should be suffered to become obsolete. But what makes a word obsolete, more than general agreement to forbear it? and how shall it be continued, when it conveys an offensive idea, or recalled again into the mouths of mankind, when it has once by disuse become unfamiliar, and by unfamiliarity unpleasing.

There is another cause of alteration more prevalent than any other, which yet in the present state of the world cannot be obviated. A mixture of two languages will produce a third distinct from both, and they will always be mixed, where the chief part of

education, and the most conspicuous accomplishment, is skill in ancient or in foreign tongues. He that has long cultivated another language, will find its words and combinations crowd upon his memory; and haste or negligence, refinement or affectation, will obtrude borrowed terms and exotic expressions.

The great pest of speech is frequency of translation. No book was ever turned from one language into another, without imparting something of its native idiom; this is the most mischievous and comprehensive innovation; single words may enter by thousands, and the fabric of the tongue continue the same, but new phraseology changes much at once; it alters not the single stones of the building, but the order<sup>1</sup> of the columns. If an academy should be established for the cultivation of our style, which I, who can never wish to see dependence multiplied, hope the spirit of English liberty will hinder or destroy, let them, instead of compiling grammars and dictionaries, endeavor with all their influence to stop the license of translators, whose idleness and ignorance, if it be suffered to proceed, will reduce us to babble a dialect of France.

If the changes that we fear be thus irresistible, what remains but to acquiesce with silence, as in the other insurmountable distresses of humanity? It remains that we retard what we cannot repel, that we palliate what we cannot cure. Life may be lengthened by care, though death cannot be ultimately defeated: tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration; we have long preserved our constitution, let us make some struggles for our language.

In hope of giving longevity to that which its own nature forbids to be immortal, I have devoted this book, the labor of years, to the honor of my country, that we may no longer yield the palm of philology without a contest to the nations of the continent. The chief glory of every people arises from its authors: whether I shall add anything by my own writings to the reputation of English literature, must be left to time. Much of my life has been lost under the pressures of disease; much has been trifled away; and much has always been spent in provision for the day that was passing over

me; but I shall not think my employment useless or ignoble, if by my assistance foreign nations, and distant ages, gain access to the propagators of knowledge, and understand the teachers of truth; if my labors afford light to the repositories of science, and add celebrity to Bacon, to Hooker, to Milton, and to Boyle.<sup>2</sup>

When I am animated by this wish, I look with pleasure on my book, however defective; and deliver it to the world with the spirit of a man that has endeavored well. That it will immediately become popular I have not promised to myself: a few wild blunders and risible absurdities, from which no work of such multiplicity was ever free, may for a time furnish folly with laughter, and harden ignorance in contempt; but useful diligence will at last prevail, and there never can be wanting some who distinguish desert;<sup>3</sup> who will consider that no dictionary of a living tongue ever can be perfect, since while it is hastening to publication, some words are budding, and some falling away; that a whole life cannot be spent upon syntax and etymology, and that even a whole life would not be sufficient; that he, whose design includes whatever language can express, must often speak of what he does not understand; that a writer will sometimes be hurried by eagerness to the end, and sometimes faint with weariness under a task, which Scaliger compares to the labors of the anvil and the mine;<sup>4</sup> that what is obvious is not always known, and what is known is not always present; that sudden fits of inadvertency will surprise vigilance, slight avocations<sup>5</sup> will reduce attention, and casual eclipses of the mind will darken learning; and that the writer shall often in vain trace his memory at the moment of need, for that which yesterday he knew with intuitive readiness, and which will come uncalled into his thoughts tomorrow.

In this work, when it shall be found that much is omitted, let it not be forgotten that much likewise is performed; and though no book was ever spared out of tenderness to the author, and the world is little solicitous to know whence proceeded the faults of that which it condemns; yet it may gratify curiosity to inform it, that the *English Dictionary* was written with little assistance of the learned, and without any patronage of the great;<sup>6</sup> not in the soft obscurities of

retirement, or under the shelter of academic bowers, but amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow: and it may repress the triumph of malignant criticism to observe, that if our language is not here fully displayed, I have only failed in an attempt which no human powers have hitherto completed. If the lexicons of ancient tongues, now immutably fixed, and comprised in a few volumes, be yet, after the toil of successive ages, inadequate and delusive; if the aggregated knowledge and cooperating diligence of the Italian academicians did not secure them from the censure of Beni;<sup>7</sup> if the embodied critics of France, when fifty years had been spent upon their work, were obliged to change its economy,<sup>8</sup> and give their second edition another form, I may surely be contented without the praise of perfection, which, if I could obtain, in this gloom of solitude, what would it avail me? I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please have sunk into the grave,<sup>9</sup> and success and miscarriage are empty sounds: I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquility, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Johnson's Plan (1747) had called for "a dictionary by which the pronunciation of our language may be fixed, and its attainment facilitated; by which its purity may be preserved, its use ascertained, and its duration lengthened."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The French academy, founded to purify the French language, had produced a dictionary in 1694; but revisions were necessary within a few years.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A bit old-fashioned (French). Le Courayer's translation (1736) of Father Paolo Sarpi's *History of the Council of Trent* superseded Amelot's (1683).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Like Boccaccio (1313–1375) and Machiavelli (1469–1527), Annibale Caro (1507–1566) was a classic Italian stylist

whose work had preceded the dictionary published in 1612 by the Italian Academy.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Swelling.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Traders.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "Sanguine" and "phlegmatic" once referred only to the physiological predominance of blood or phlegm. "Zenith" (the point of the sky directly overhead) and "eccentric" (deviating from the center) were originally astronomical and geometrical terms.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "A change of a word from its original signification" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: "A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue" (1712). "Petty": little.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Architectural mode (Doric, etc.), which determines the style and proportions of columns.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Leading physicist and chemist (1627–1691). "Science": knowledge. Richard Hooker wrote *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594–97), a famous defense of the Church of England.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Merit.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609), a great scholar and lexicographer, wrote Latin verses suggesting that criminals should be condemned to lexicography.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Whatever calls one aside.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See Johnson's letter to Lord Chesterfield in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* on p. 886.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Paolo Beni's *L'Anticrusca* (1612) violently attacked the first edition of the *Vocabolario* (the Italian dictionary).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Organization.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Johnson's wife had died three years earlier.[Return to reference 9](#)

## [SOME DEFINITIONS: A SMALL ANTHOLOGY]<sup>1</sup>

To CI'VILIZE. *v.a.*<sup>2</sup>

To reclaim from savageness and brutality; to instruct in the arts of regular life.  
We send the graces and the muses forth,  
To *civilize* and to instruct the North.

Amongst those who are counted the *civilized* part of mankind, this original law of nature still takes place.

CO'LONY. *n.s.*<sup>5</sup>

1. A body of people drawn from the mother-country to inhabit some distant place.

Rooting out these two rebellious septs, he placed English *colonies* in their rooms.

*Davie*

2. The country planted; a plantation.

The rising city, which from far you see,  
Is Carthage; and a Trojan *colony*.

*Dry*

CURIO'SITY. *n.s.*

1. Inquisitiveness; inclination to enquiry.

2. Nicety; delicacy.

When thou wast in thy gilt, and thy perfume, they mockt thee for too much *curiosity*; in thy rags thou knowest none, but art despised for the contrary.

*Shakesp*

3. Accuracy; exactness.

Our eyes and senses, however armed or assisted, are too gross to discern the *curiosity* of the workmanship of nature.

*Ray on*

4. An act of curiosity; nice experiment.

There hath been practiced also a *curiosity*, to set a tree upon the north-side of a wall, and, at a little height, to draw it through the wall, and spread it upon the south-side; conceiving that the root and lower part of the stock should enjoy the freshness of the shade, and the upper boughs and fruit, the comfort of the sun; but it sorted not.

*Bacon's*

5. An object of curiosity; rarity.

We took a ramble together to see the *curiosities* of this great town.

*Addison's Freeholder, No. 47.*<sup>2</sup>

ENTHU'SIASM. *n.s.*

1. A vain belief of private revelation; a vain confidence of divine favor or communication.

*Enthusiasm* is founded neither on reason nor divine revelation, but rises from the conceits of a warmed or overweening brain.

2. Heat of imagination; violence of passion; confidence of opinion.

3. Elevation of fancy; exaltation of ideas.

Imaging is, in itself, the very height and life of poetry, which, by a kind of *enthusiasm*, or extraordinary emotion of soul, makes it seem to us that we behold those things which the poet paints.

Dryden's

GE'NIUS. *n.s.*

1. The protecting or ruling power of men, places, or things.

And as I awake, sweet music breathe,  
Sent by some spirit to mortals good,  
Or th' unseen *genius* of the wood.

2. A man endowed with superior faculties.

There is no little writer of Pindaric who is not mentioned as a prodigious *genius*.

3. Mental power or faculties.

4. Disposition of nature by which any one is qualified for some peculiar employment.

5. Nature; disposition.

LEXICO'GRAPHER. *n.s.*

A writer of dictionaries; a harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the signification of words.

MELANCHO'LY. *n.s.*

1. A disease, supposed to proceed from a redundance of black bile; but it is better known to arise from too heavy and too viscid blood: its cure is in evacuation, nervous medicines, and powerful stimuli.

2. A kind of madness, in which the mind is always fixed on one object.

3. A gloomy, pensive, discontented temper.

NA'TURE. *n.s.*

1. An imaginary being supposed to preside over the material and animal world.

Thou, *nature*, art my goddess; to thy law  
My services are bound.

Shakespeare

2. The native state or properties of any thing, by which it is discriminated from others.

3. The constitution of an animated body.

4. Disposition of mind; temper.

5. The regular course of things.

6. The compass of natural existence.

If their dam may be judge, the young apes are the most beautiful things in  
*nature*.

7. Natural affection, or reverence; native sensations.

8. The state or operation of the material world.

9. Sort; species.

10. Sentiments or images adapted to nature, or conformable to truth and reality.

11. Physics; the science which teaches the qualities of things.

*Nature* and *nature's* laws lay hid in night,  
God said, Let Newton be, and all was light.

PA'TRON. *n.s.*

1. One who countenances, supports or protects. Commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery.

PI'RATE. *n.s.*

1. A sea-robber.

Relate, if business or the thirst of gain  
Engage your journey o'er the pathless main,  
Where savage *pirates* seek through seas unknown  
The lives of others, vent'rous of their own.

2. Any robber; particularly a bookseller who seizes the copies of other men.

SA'TIRE. *n.s.*

A poem in which wickedness or folly is censured. Proper *satire* is distinguished, by the generality of the reflections, from a *lampoon* which is aimed against a particular person; but they are too frequently confounded.

SA'VAGE. *n.s.*

A man untaught and uncivilized; a barbarian.

To deprive us of metals is to make us mere *savages*; to change our corn for the old Arcadian diet, our houses and cities for dens and caves, and our clothing for skins of beasts: 'tis to bereave us of all arts and sciences, nay, of revealed religion.

TA'LENT. *n.s.*

1. A *talent* signified so much weight, or a sum of money, the value differing according to the different ages and countries.



2. Faculty; power; gift of nature. A metaphor borrowed from the talents mentioned in the holy writ.

Persons who possess the true *talent* of raillery are like comets; they are seldom seen, and all at once admired and feared.

*Fe*

3. Quality; nature. An improper and mistaken use.

WIT. *n.s.*

1. The powers of the mind; the mental faculties; the intellects. This is the original signification.

2. Imagination; quickness of fancy.

3. Sentiments produced by quickness of fancy.

The definition of *wit* is only this; that it is a propriety of thoughts and words; or, in other terms, thoughts and words elegantly adapted to the subject.

4. A man of fancy.

To tell them wou'd a hundred tongues require;  
Or one vain *wit's*, that might a hundred tire.

5. A man of genius.

6. Sense; judgment.

7. In the plural. Sound mind; intellect not crazed.

Sound sleep cometh of moderate eating; he riseth early, and his *wits* are with him: but the pain of watching, and choler, and pangs of the belly, are with an insatiable man.

*Ei*

8. Contrivance; stratagem; power of expedients.

## Endnotes

1775

- Note 1: Johnson's definitions include etymologies, which are omitted here. Johnson is also innovative in including numerous quotations from English authors to illustrate the meanings of each word, which he sometimes condenses or otherwise slightly alters for clarity (not all of Johnson's quoted illustrations for each word are included here). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Verb active. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Edmund Waller, from "To My Lord of Falkland," lines 3–4, *Poems &c. Written by Mr. Ed. Waller* (1645). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1690). [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Noun substantive; Johnson's term for what we today call simply "noun." [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: John Davies, *Historical Relations, or, A Discovery of the True Causes Why Ireland was Never Intirely Subdu'd nor Brought under*

*Obedience of the Crown of England until the Beginning of the Reign of King James of Happy Memory* (1664). "Septs": divisions of a nation or tribe.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: John Dryden, *The Works of Virgil Containing His Pastorals, Georgics, and Aeneis* (1697), *Aeneid* 1, 341–42. (Johnson mistakenly substitutes "Trojan" for the original word "Tyrian," that is, from the ancient Phoenician city of Tyre.)[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens* 4.3. 336–39.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: John Ray, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Creation* (1691).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum, or, a Natural History, in Ten Centuries* (1627).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Joseph Addison, *The Freeholder* (1715–16).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (4th ed., 1700).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: John Dryden, "The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry, and Poetic License," preface to *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man* (1677).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Milton, *Il Penseroso*, lines 151–54 (line omitted), *Poems of Mr. John Milton, Both English and Latin* (1645).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Johnson adapts the gist of Joseph Addison's essay on genius, in *Spectator* 160 (1711).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: John Quincy, *Lexicon Physico-Medicum, or, a New Medical Dictionary* (1719).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: William Shakespeare, *King Lear* 1.2. 1–2.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Joseph Glanvill, *Scepsis Scientifica, or Confest Ignorance the Way to Science, in an Essay of the Vanity of Dogmatizing, and Confident Opinion* (1665).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Alexander Pope, [Epitaph] "Intended for Sir Isaac Newton, in Westminster Abbey," in *The Works of Alexander Pope* (1735).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Alexander Pope, *The Odyssey of Homer* (1725–26), book 3, lines 86–89.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Richard Bentley, *Eight Sermons Preach'd at the Honourable Robert Boyle's Lecture* (1724).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: John Arbuthnot, *Tables of Ancient Coins, Weights, and Measures* (1727).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote; or, the Adventures of Arabella* (1752). The vast majority of Johnson's quotations are from texts

written by men. This is one of a few examples, however, when a woman writer is included.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: John Dryden, "The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry, and Poetic License," preface to *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man* (1677).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (1709, 1711), lines 44–45.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Ecclesiasticus, or the Book of Sirach (apocryphal book of the Bible), 31:20.[Return to reference 8](#)

**The Preface to Shakespeare** This is the finest piece of Shakespeare criticism in the eighteenth century; it culminates a critical tradition that began with John Dryden's remarks on Shakespeare and continued as the plays were edited by Nicholas Rowe, Alexander Pope, Lewis Theobald, and William Warburton. Johnson addresses the standard topics: Shakespeare is the poet of nature, not learning; the creator of characters who spring to life; and a writer whose works express the full range of human passions. But the Preface also takes a fresh look not only at the plays but at the first principles of criticism. Resisting "bardolatry"—uncritical worship of Shakespeare—Johnson points out his faults as well as his virtues and finds that his truth to life, or "just representations of general nature," surpasses that of all other modern writers.

# ***From The Preface to Shakespeare***

## **[SHAKESPEARE'S EXCELLENCE, GENERAL NATURE]**

That praises are without reason lavished on the dead, and that the honors due only to excellence are paid to antiquity, is a complaint likely to be always continued by those who, being able to add nothing to truth, hope for eminence from the heresies of paradox; or those who, being forced by disappointment upon consolatory expedients, are willing to hope from posterity what the present age refuses, and flatter themselves that the regard which is yet denied by envy will be at last bestowed by time.

Antiquity, like every other quality that attracts the notice of mankind, has undoubtedly votaries that reverence it not from reason but from prejudice. Some seem to admire indiscriminately whatever has been long preserved, without considering that time has sometimes cooperated with chance; all perhaps are more willing to honor past than present excellence; and the mind contemplates genius through the shades of age, as the eye surveys the sun through artificial opacity. The great contention of criticism is to find the faults of the moderns and the beauties of the ancients. While an author is yet living we estimate his powers by his worst performance; and when he is dead we rate them by his best.

To works, however, of which the excellence is not absolute and definite, but gradual and comparative; to works not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientific, but appealing wholly to observation and experience, no other test can be applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem. What mankind have long possessed they have often examined and compared; and if they persist to value the possession, it is because frequent comparisons have confirmed opinion in its favor. As among the works of nature no man can properly call a river deep or a mountain high, without the

knowledge of many mountains and many rivers; so in the productions of genius, nothing can be styled excellent till it has been compared with other works of the same kind. Demonstration<sup>1</sup> immediately displays its power and has nothing to hope or fear from the flux of years; but works tentative and experimental must be estimated by their proportion to the general and collective ability of man, as it is discovered in a long succession of endeavors. Of the first building that was raised, it might be with certainty determined that it was round or square, but whether it was spacious or lofty must have been referred to time. The Pythagorean scale of numbers<sup>2</sup> was at once discovered to be perfect; but the poems of Homer we yet know not to transcend the common limits of human intelligence, but by remarking that nation after nation, and century after century, has been able to do little more than transpose his incidents, new name his characters, and paraphrase his sentiments.

The reverence due to writings that have long subsisted arises, therefore, not from any credulous confidence in the superior wisdom of past ages, or gloomy persuasion of the degeneracy of mankind, but is the consequence of acknowledged and indubitable positions, that what has been longest known has been most considered, and what is most considered is best understood.

The poet of whose works I have undertaken the revision may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration. He has long outlived his century, the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit.<sup>3</sup> Whatever advantages he might once derive from personal allusions, local customs, or temporary opinions, have for many years been lost; and every topic of merriment or motive of sorrow which the modes of artificial life afforded him now only obscure the scenes which they once illuminated. The effects of favor and competition are at an end; the tradition of his friendships and his enmities has perished; his works support no opinion with arguments nor supply any faction with invectives; they can neither indulge vanity nor gratify malignity; but are read without any other reason than the desire of pleasure, and are therefore praised only as

pleasure is obtained; yet, thus unassisted by interest or passion, they have passed through variations of taste and changes of manners, and, as they devolved from one generation to another, have received new honors at every transmission.

But because human judgment, though it be gradually gaining upon certainty, never becomes infallible, and approbation, though long continued, may yet be only the approbation of prejudice or fashion, it is proper to inquire by what peculiarities of excellence Shakespeare has gained and kept the favor of his countrymen.

Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature. Particular manners can be known to few, and therefore few only can judge how nearly they are copied. The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight awhile by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest; but the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth.

Shakespeare is, above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature, the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpracticed by the rest of the world; by the peculiarities of studies or professions, which can operate but upon small numbers; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions: they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply and observation will always find. His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated and the whole system of life is continued in motion. In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual: in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species.

It is from this wide extension of design that so much instruction is derived. It is this which fills the plays of Shakespeare with practical axioms and domestic wisdom. It was said of Euripides<sup>4</sup> that every verse was a precept; and it may be said of Shakespeare that from his works may be collected a system of civil and economical prudence. Yet his real power is not shown in the splendor of

particular passages, but by the progress of his fable<sup>5</sup> and the tenor of his dialogue; and he that tries to recommend him by select quotations will succeed like the pedant in Hierocles<sup>6</sup> who, when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen.

It will not easily be imagined how much Shakespeare excels in accommodating his sentiments to real life but by comparing him with other authors. It was observed of the ancient schools of declamation that the more diligently they were frequented, the more was the student disqualified for the world, because he found nothing there which he should ever meet in any other place. The same remark may be applied to every stage but that of Shakespeare. The theater, when it is under any other direction, is peopled by such characters as were never seen, conversing in a language which was never heard, upon topics which will never arise in the commerce of mankind. But the dialogue of this author is often so evidently determined by the incident which produces it, and is pursued with so much ease and simplicity, that it seems scarcely to claim the merit of fiction, but to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation and common occurrences.

Upon every other stage the universal agent is love, by whose power all good and evil is distributed and every action quickened or retarded. To bring a lover, a lady, and a rival into the fable; to entangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with oppositions of interest, and harass them with violence of desires inconsistent with each other; to make them meet in rapture, and part in agony; to fill their mouths with hyperbolical joy and outrageous sorrow; to distress them as nothing human ever was distressed; to deliver them as nothing human ever was delivered, is the business of a modern dramatist. For this, probability is violated, life is misrepresented, and language is depraved. But love is only one of many passions; and as it has no great influence upon the sum of life, it has little operation in the dramas of a poet who caught his ideas from the living world and exhibited only what he saw before him. He knew that any other passion, as it was regular or exorbitant, was a cause of happiness or calamity.



Characters thus ample and general were not easily discriminated and preserved; yet perhaps no poet ever kept his personages more distinct from each other. I will not say with Pope that every speech may be assigned to the proper speaker,<sup>7</sup> because many speeches there are which have nothing characteristical; but perhaps though some may be equally adapted to every person, it will be difficult to find that any can be properly transferred from the present possessor to another claimant. The choice is right when there is reason for choice.

Other dramatists can only gain attention by hyperbolical or aggravated characters, by fabulous and unexampled excellence or depravity, as the writers of barbarous romances invigorated the reader by a giant and a dwarf; and he that should form his expectations of human affairs from the play or from the tale would be equally deceived. Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion; even where the agency is supernatural, the dialogue is level with life. Other writers disguise the most natural passions and most frequent incidents so that he who contemplates them in the book will not know them in the world: Shakespeare approximates<sup>8</sup> the remote, and familiarizes the wonderful; the event which he represents will not happen, but, if it were possible, its effects would probably be such as he has assigned; and it may be said that he has not only shown human nature as it acts in real exigencies, but as it would be found in trials to which it cannot be exposed.

This therefore is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life; that he who has mazed his imagination in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies by reading human sentiments in human language, by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: “The highest degree of deducible or argumental evidence” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pythagoras discovered the ratios that determine the principal intervals of the musical scale.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Horace’s *Epistles* 2.1.39.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Greek tragic poet (ca. 480–406 B.C.E.). The observation is Cicero’s.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Plot. “The series or contexture of events which constitute a poem epic or dramatic” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hierocles of Alexandria (5th century C.E.), Greek philosopher.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In the preface to his edition of Shakespeare’s plays (1725).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Brings near.[Return to reference 8](#)

## [SHAKESPEARE'S FAULTS]

Shakespeare with his excellencies has likewise faults, and faults sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit. I shall show them in the proportion in which they appear to me, without envious malignity or superstitious veneration. No question can be more innocently discussed than a dead poet's pretensions to renown; and little regard is due to that bigotry which sets candor<sup>9</sup> higher than truth.

His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally, but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place.

The plots are often so loosely formed that a very slight consideration may improve them, and so carelessly pursued that he seems not always fully to comprehend his own design. He omits opportunities of instructing or delighting which the train of his story seems to force upon him, and apparently rejects those exhibitions which would be more affecting for the sake of those which are more easy.

It may be observed that in many of his plays the latter part is evidently neglected. When he found himself near the end of his work, and in view of his reward, he shortened the labor to snatch the profit. He therefore remits his efforts where he should most

vigorously exert them, and his catastrophe is improbably produced or imperfectly represented.

He had no regard to distinction of time or place, but gives to one age or nation, without scruple, the customs, institutions, and opinions of another, at the expense not only of likelihood but of possibility. These faults Pope has endeavored, with more zeal than judgment, to transfer to his imagined interpolators. We need not wonder to find Hector quoting Aristotle, when we see the loves of Theseus and Hippolyta combined with the Gothic mythology of fairies.<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, indeed, was not the only violator of chronology, for in the same age Sidney, who wanted not the advantages of learning, has, in his *Arcadia*, confounded the pastoral with the feudal times, the days of innocence, quiet, and security with those of turbulence, violence, and adventure.

In his comic scenes he is seldom very successful when he engages his characters in reciprocations of smartness and contests of sarcasm; their jests are commonly gross, and their pleasantry licentious; neither his gentlemen nor his ladies have much delicacy, nor are sufficiently distinguished from his clowns<sup>2</sup> by any appearance of refined manners. Whether he represented the real conversation of his time is not easy to determine: the reign of Elizabeth is commonly supposed to have been a time of stateliness, formality, and reserve; yet perhaps the relaxations of that severity were not very elegant. There must, however, have been always some modes of gaiety preferable to others, and a writer ought to choose the best.

In tragedy his performance seems constantly to be worse as his labor is more. The effusions of passion, which exigence forces out, are for the most part striking and energetic; but whenever he solicits his invention, or strains his faculties, the offspring of his throes is tumor,<sup>3</sup> meanness, tediousness, and obscurity.

In narration he affects a disproportionate pomp of diction and a wearisome train of circumlocution, and tells the incident imperfectly in many words which might have been more plainly delivered in few. Narration in dramatic poetry is naturally tedious, as it is unanimated

and inactive, and obstructs the progress of the action; it should therefore always be rapid and enlivened by frequent interruption. Shakespeare found it an encumbrance, and instead of lightening it by brevity, endeavored to recommend it by dignity and splendor.

His declamations or set speeches are commonly cold and weak, for his power was the power of nature; when he endeavored, like other tragic writers, to catch opportunities of amplification and, instead of inquiring what the occasion demanded, to show how much his stores of knowledge could supply, he seldom escapes without the pity or resentment of his reader.

It is incident to him to be now and then entangled with an unwieldy sentiment which he cannot well express, and will not reject; he struggles with it awhile, and, if it continues stubborn, comprises it in words such as occur, and leaves it to be disentangled and evolved<sup>4</sup> by those who have more leisure to bestow upon it.

Not that always where the language is intricate the thought is subtle, or the image always great where the line is bulky; the equality of words to things is very often neglected, and trivial sentiments and vulgar<sup>5</sup> ideas disappoint the attention, to which they are recommended by sonorous epithets and swelling figures.

But the admirers of this great poet have most reason to complain when he approaches nearest to his highest excellence, and seems fully resolved to sink them in dejection and mollify them with tender emotions by the fall of greatness, the danger of innocence, or the crosses of love. What he does best, he soon ceases to do. He is not long soft and pathetic without some idle conceit or contemptible equivocation. He no sooner begins to move than he counteracts himself; and terror and pity, as they are rising in the mind, are checked and blasted by sudden frigidity.

A quibble<sup>6</sup> is to Shakespeare what luminous vapors are to the traveler: he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity or profundity of his disquisitions, whether he be enlarging knowledge or exalting affection, whether he be amusing<sup>7</sup>

attention with incidents, or enchaining it in suspense, let but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career<sup>8</sup> or stoop from his elevation. A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight that he was content to purchase it by the sacrifice of reason, propriety, and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.

It will be thought strange that in enumerating the defects of this writer, I have not yet mentioned his neglect of the unities; his violation of those laws which have been instituted and established by the joint authority of poets and critics.

For his other deviations from the art of writing, I resign him to critical justice without making any other demand in his favor than that which must be indulged to all human excellence: that his virtues be rated with his failings. But from the censure which this irregularity may bring upon him I shall, with due reverence to that learning which I must oppose, adventure to try how I can defend him.

His histories, being neither tragedies nor comedies, are not subject to any of their laws; nothing more is necessary to all the praise which they expect than that the changes of action be so prepared as to be understood; that the incidents be various and affecting, and the characters consistent, natural, and distinct. No other unity is intended, and therefore none is to be sought.

In his other works he has well enough preserved the unity of action. He has not, indeed, an intrigue regularly perplexed and regularly unraveled: he does not endeavor to hide his design only to discover it, for this is seldom the order of real events, and Shakespeare is the poet of nature: but his plan has commonly what Aristotle requires,<sup>9</sup> a beginning, a middle, and an end; one event is concatenated with another, and the conclusion follows by easy consequence. There are, perhaps, some incidents that might be spared, as in other poets there is much talk that only fills up time upon the stage; but the general system makes gradual advances, and the end of the play is the end of expectation.

## Endnotes

1765

- Note 9: Kindness.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In *Troilus and Cressida* 2.2.166 and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, respectively.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rustics.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Inflated grandeur, false magnificence.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Unfolded.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Mean; low; being of the common rate" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pun.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "To entertain with tranquility; to fill with thoughts that engage the mind, without distracting it" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Course of action; the ground on which a race is run. In Greek legend Atalanta refused to marry any man who could not defeat her in a foot race. Hippomenes won her by dropping, as he ran, three of the golden apples of the Hesperides, which she paused to pick up.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: *Poetics* 7.[Return to reference 9](#)

# **JAMES BOSWELL**

## **1740–1795**

The discovery of a vast number of James Boswell's personal papers (believed until 1925 to have been destroyed by his literary executors) has made it possible to know the author of *The Life of Samuel Johnson* as well as we can know anybody from the past. His published letters and journals have made modern readers aware of the serious and absurd, the charming and repellent sides of his character. At twenty-two, when he met Johnson, he had already trained himself to listen, to observe, and to remember until he found time to write it all down. Only rarely did he take notes while a conversation was in progress, since to do so would of course have been a serious breach of social etiquette. His unusual memory and disciplined art enabled him to re-create and vividly preserve the many "scenes" that distinguish his journals as they do the *Life*.

Boswell was the eldest son and heir of Alexander Boswell of Auchinleck (pronounced *Affléck*) in Ayreshire, in Scotland, a judge who bore the courtesy title of Lord Auchinleck. As a member of an ancient family and heir to its large estate, Boswell was in the technical sense of the term a gentleman, with entrée into the best circles of Edinburgh and London. By temperament he was unstable, emotionally and sexually skittish. After attending the universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow and studying law in Holland, he made the grand tour of Europe; in Switzerland he met and succeeded in captivating the two foremost French men of letters, Jean-Jacques



Rousseau and Voltaire. He visited the beleaguered hero of Corsica, General Pasquale de Paoli, whose revolt against Genoa seemed to European liberals to embody all the civic and military virtues of Republican Rome. Upon returning to England, Boswell wrote *An Account of Corsica* (1768). It was promptly translated into Dutch, German, French, and Italian, and its young author found himself with a considerable European reputation.

By 1769, Boswell was established in what was to prove a successful law practice in Edinburgh and had married his cousin, Margaret Montgomerie. But he kept his ties to London and Johnson. In 1773, he fulfilled a plan first suggested by Johnson ten years earlier to tour the Scottish Highlands and Hebrides together, which resulted in a book by each. Almost every aspect of the adventure should have made it impossible. Johnson, nearing his sixty-fourth birthday and after years of sedentary city living, found himself astride a horse in wild country or in open boats in autumn weather. As a devout Anglican, he was an outspoken enemy of the Presbyterian Church. As a lover of London, he was a stranger to the primitive life of the Highlands. Moreover, for many years he had half-jestingly, half-seriously, made Scots the butt of his wit. But such were Boswell's social tact and Johnson's vigor and curiosity that the tour was a great success. Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) is a thoughtful account of the way that people live in the Hebrides (though some Scots were offended). Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785), a preliminary study for the *Life*, is a lively and entertaining diary that amused Johnson himself.

In 1786, four years after Johnson's death, Boswell abandoned his Scottish practice; moved to London; was admitted to the English bar (but never actually practiced); and, often depressed and drunken, began the *Life*. Fortunately he had the help and encouragement of the distinguished literary scholar Edmond Malone, without whose guidance he might never have finished his task.

Boswell had an overwhelming amount of material to deal with: his own journals, all of Johnson's letters that he could find, Johnson's voluminous writings, and every scrap of information that

his friends would furnish—all of which had to be collected, verified, and somehow reduced to unity. The *Life* is a record not of Johnson alone but of literary England during the last half of the century. But Boswell wrote with his eye on the object, and that object was Samuel Johnson, toward whom such eminent persons as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith, Lord Chesterfield—even the king himself—always face. Individual episodes are designed to reveal the great protagonist in a variety of aspects, and the world that Boswell created and populated is sustained by the vitality of his hero.

Boswell's talent is not only narrative but also dramatic. A gifted mimic, he often writes like a theatrical improviser, creating scenes with living people and playing simultaneously the roles of contriver of the dialogue, director of the plot, actor in the drama, and applauding audience—for Boswell kept an eye on his own performance. The quintessence of Boswell as both a social genius and a literary artist is to be found in his description of his visit to Voltaire: "I placed myself by him. I touched the keys in unison with his imagination. I wish you had heard the music."

Although the Johnson of popular legend is largely Boswell's creation, there was much in his life about which Boswell had no firsthand knowledge. At their first meeting, Johnson was fifty-four, a widower, already established as "Dictionary" Johnson and the author of the *Rambler*, and pensioned by the Crown. Boswell knew nothing at firsthand of the long, hard years during which Johnson made his way painfully up from obscurity to fame. And Boswell, himself a glib and rather thoughtless opponent of the abolitionist movement (see [p. 981](#)), mostly suppressed or downplayed Johnson's ardent hatred of slavery. Hence the *Life* is a portrait of the sage as Boswell wanted him to be. Its chief glory is conversation: the talk of a man who has experienced broadly, read widely, and observed and reflected on his observations; whose ideas are constantly brought to the test of experience; and whose experience is habitually transmuted into ideas. The book is as large as life and as human as its central character.

***From The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.***

### [PLAN OF THE *LIFE*]

\* \* \* Had Dr. Johnson written his own life, in conformity with the opinion which he has given, that every man's life may be best written by himself;<sup>1</sup> had he employed in the preservation of his own history, that clearness of narration and elegance of language in which he has embalmed so many eminent persons, the world would probably have had the most perfect example of biography that was ever exhibited. But although he at different times, in a desultory manner, committed to writing many particulars of the progress of his mind and fortunes, he never had persevering diligence enough to form them into a regular composition. Of these memorials a few have been preserved; but the greater part was consigned by him to the flames, a few days before his death.

As I had the honor and happiness of enjoying his friendship for upwards of twenty years; as I had the scheme of writing his life constantly in view; as he was well apprised of this circumstance, and from time to time obligingly satisfied my inquiries, by communicating to me the incidents of his early years; as I acquired a facility in recollecting, and was very assiduous in recording, his conversation, of which the extraordinary vigor and vivacity constituted one of the first features of his character; and as I have spared no pains in obtaining materials concerning him, from every quarter where I could discover that they were to be found, and have been favored with the most liberal communications by his friends; I flatter myself that few biographers have entered upon such a work as this with more advantages; independent of literary abilities, in which I am not vain enough to compare myself with some great names who have gone before me in this kind of writing. \* \* \*

Instead of melting down my materials into one mass, and constantly speaking in my own person, by which I might have appeared to have more merit in the execution of the work, I have resolved to adopt and enlarge upon the excellent plan of Mr. Mason, in his *Memoirs of Gray*.<sup>2</sup> Wherever narrative is necessary to explain,

connect, and supply, I furnish it to the best of my abilities; but in the chronological series of Johnson's life, which I trace as distinctly as I can, year by year, I produce, wherever it is in my power, his own minutes, letters, or conversation, being convinced that this mode is more lively, and will make my readers better acquainted with him than even most of those were who actually knew him, but could know him only partially; whereas there is here an accumulation of intelligence from various points, by which his character is more fully understood and illustrated.

Indeed I cannot conceive a more perfect mode of writing any man's life than not only relating all the most important events of it in their order, but interweaving what he privately wrote, and said, and thought; by which mankind are enabled as it were to see him live, and to "live o'er each scene"<sup>3</sup> with him, as he actually advanced through the several stages of his life. Had his other friends been as diligent and ardent as I was, he might have been almost entirely preserved. As it is, I will venture to say that he will be seen in this work more completely than any man who has ever yet lived.

And he will be seen as he really was; for I profess to write, not his panegyric, which must be all praise, but his Life; which, great and good as he was, must not be supposed to be entirely perfect. To be as he was, is indeed subject of panegyric enough to any man in this state of being; but in every picture there should be shade as well as light, and when I delineate him without reserve, I do what he himself recommended, both by his precept and his example.

\* \* \*

Of one thing I am certain, that considering how highly the small portion which we have of the table-talk and other anecdotes of our celebrated writers is valued, and how earnestly it is regretted that we have not more, I am justified in preserving rather too many of Johnson's sayings, than too few; especially as from the diversity of dispositions it cannot be known with certainty beforehand, whether what may seem trifling to some, and perhaps to the collector himself, may not be most agreeable to many; and the greater

number that an author can please in any degree, the more pleasure does there arise to a benevolent mind. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: *Idler* 84.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: William Mason, poet and dramatist, published his life of Thomas Gray in 1774:[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pope's Prologue to Addison's *Cato*, line 4.[Return to reference 3](#)

## [THE LETTER TO CHESTERFIELD]

[1754] Lord Chesterfield,<sup>4</sup> to whom Johnson had paid the high compliment of addressing to his Lordship the *Plan* of his *Dictionary*, had behaved to him in such a manner as to excite his contempt and indignation. The world has been for many years amused with a story confidently told, and as confidently repeated with additional circumstances, that a sudden disgust was taken by Johnson upon occasion of his having been one day kept long in waiting in his Lordship's antechamber, for which the reason assigned was that he had company with him; and that at last, when the door opened, out walked Colley Cibber,<sup>5</sup> and that Johnson was so violently provoked when he found for whom he had been so long excluded, that he went away in a passion, and never would return. I remember having mentioned this story to George Lord Lyttelton, who told me he was very intimate with Lord Chesterfield; and holding it as a well-known truth, defended Lord Chesterfield, by saying, that Cibber, who had been introduced familiarly by the back stairs, had probably not been there above ten minutes. It may seem strange even to entertain a doubt concerning a story so long and so widely current, and thus implicitly adopted, if not sanctioned, by the authority which I have mentioned; but Johnson himself assured me that there was not the least foundation for it. He told me that there never was any particular incident which produced a quarrel between Lord Chesterfield and him; but that his Lordship's continued neglect was the reason why he resolved to have no connection with him. When the *Dictionary* was upon the eve of publication, Lord Chesterfield, who, it is said, had flattered himself with expectations that Johnson would dedicate the work to him, attempted, in a courtly manner, to soothe, and insinuate himself with the sage, conscious, as it should seem, of the cold indifference with which he had treated its learned author; and further attempted to conciliate him, by writing two papers in *The World*, in recommendation of the work; and it must be confessed that they contain some studied compliments, so finely turned, that if there had been no previous offense, it is probable that

Johnson would have been highly delighted. Praise, in general, was pleasing to him; but by praise from a man of rank and elegant accomplishments, he was peculiarly gratified. \* \* \*

This courtly device failed of its effect. Johnson, who thought that "all was false and hollow,"<sup>6</sup> despised the honeyed words, and was even indignant that Lord Chesterfield should, for a moment, imagine that he could be dupe of such an artifice. His expression to me concerning Lord Chesterfield, upon this occasion, was, "Sir, after making great professions, he had, for many years, taken no notice of me; but when my *Dictionary* was coming out, he fell a-scribbling in *The World* about it. Upon which, I wrote him a letter expressed in civil terms, but such as might show him that I did not mind what he said or wrote, and that I had done with him."

This is that celebrated letter of which so much has been said, and about which curiosity has been so long excited, without being gratified. I for many years solicited Johnson to favor me with a copy of it, that so excellent a composition might not be lost to posterity. He delayed from time to time to give it me; till at last in 1781, when we were on a visit at Mr. Dilly's,<sup>7</sup> at Southill in Bedfordshire, he was pleased to dictate it to me from memory. He afterwards found among his papers a copy of it, which he had dictated to Mr. Baretti,<sup>8</sup> with its title and corrections, in his own handwriting. This he gave to Mr. Langton; adding that if it were to come into print, he wished it to be from that copy. By Mr. Langton's kindness, I am enabled to enrich my work with a perfect transcript of what the world has so eagerly desired to see.

**TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE THE EARL OF CHESTERFIELD**

February 7, 1755

MY LORD,

I have been lately informed, by the proprietor of the *World*, that two papers, in which my *Dictionary* is recommended to the public, were written by your Lordship. To be so distinguished, is an honor, which, being very little



accustomed to favors from the great, I know not well how to receive, or in what terms to acknowledge.

When, upon some slight encouragement, I first visited your Lordship, I was overpowered, like the rest of mankind, by the enchantment of your address; and could not forbear to wish that I might boast myself *Le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre*<sup>9</sup>—that I might obtain that regard for which I saw the world contending; but I found my attendance so little encouraged that neither pride nor modesty would suffer me to continue it. When I had once addressed your Lordship in public, I had exhausted all the art of pleasing which a retired and uncourtly scholar can possess. I had done all that I could; and no man is well pleased to have his all neglected, be it ever so little.

Seven years, my Lord, have now passed since I waited in your outward rooms, or was repulsed from your door; during which time I have been pushing on my work through difficulties of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it, at last, to the verge of publication, without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favor. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a patron before.

The shepherd in Virgil grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him a native of the rocks.<sup>1</sup>

Is not a patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labors, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a patron which Providence has enabled me to do for myself.

Having carried on my work thus far with so little obligation to any favorer of learning, I shall not be disappointed though I should conclude it, if less be possible, with less; for I have been long awakened from that dream of hope in which I once boasted myself with so much exultation, my Lord, your Lordship's most humble, most obedient servant,

SAM. JOHNSON.

"While this was the talk of the town," says Dr. Adams, in a letter to me, "I happened to visit Dr. Warburton,<sup>2</sup> who finding that I was acquainted with Johnson, desired me earnestly to carry his compliments to him, and to tell him that he honored him for his manly behavior in rejecting these condescensions of Lord Chesterfield, and for resenting the treatment he had received from him, with a proper spirit. Johnson was visibly pleased with this compliment, for he had always a high opinion of Warburton. Indeed, the force of mind which appeared in this letter was congenial with that which Warburton himself amply possessed."

There is a curious minute circumstance which struck me, in comparing the various editions of Johnson's imitations of Juvenal. In the tenth satire, one of the couplets upon the vanity of wishes even for literary distinction stood thus:

Yet think what ills the scholar's life assail,  
Toil, envy, want, the *garret*, and the jail.

But after experiencing the uneasiness which Lord Chesterfield's fallacious patronage made him feel, he dismissed the word *garret* from the sad group, and in all the subsequent editions the line stands

Toil, envy, want, the *patron*, and the jail.

[1762] The accession of George the Third to the throne of these kingdoms<sup>3</sup> opened a new and brighter prospect to men of literary merit, who had been honored with no mark of royal favor in the preceding reign. His present Majesty's education in this country, as well as his taste and beneficence, prompted him to be the patron of science and the arts; and early this year Johnson, having been represented to him as a very learned and good man, without any certain provision, his Majesty was pleased to grant him a pension of three hundred pounds a year. The Earl of Bute,<sup>4</sup> who was then Prime Minister, had the honor to announce this instance of his Sovereign's bounty, concerning which many and various stories, all equally erroneous, have been propagated: maliciously representing it as a political bribe to Johnson, to desert his avowed principles, and become the tool of a government which he held to be founded in usurpation. I have taken care to have it in my power to refute them from the most authentic information. Lord Bute told me that Mr. Wedderburne, now Lord Loughborough, was the person who first mentioned this subject to him. Lord Loughborough told me that the pension was granted to Johnson solely as the reward of his literary merit, without any stipulation whatever, or even tacit understanding that he should write for administration. His Lordship added that he was confident the political tracts which Johnson afterwards did write, as they were entirely consonant with his own opinions, would have been written by him though no pension had been granted to him.<sup>5</sup>\*

\* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield (1694–1773), statesman, wit, man of fashion. His *Letters*, written for the guidance of his natural son, are famous for their worldly good sense and for their expression of the ideal of an 18th-century gentleman. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Cibber (1671–1757), playwright, comic actor, and (after 1730) poet laureate. A fine actor but a very bad poet, Cibber was a constant object of ridicule by the wits of the town. Pope made him king of the Dunces in the *Dunciad* of 1743.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: *Paradise Lost* 2.112.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Southill was the country home of Charles and Edward Dilly, publishers. The firm published all of Boswell's serious works and shared in the publication of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779–81).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Giuseppe Baretti, an Italian writer and lexicographer whom Johnson introduced into his circle.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The conqueror of the conqueror of the earth (French). From the first line of Scudéry's epic *Alaric* (1654).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: *Eclogues* 8.44.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: William Warburton, bishop of Gloucester, friend and literary executor of Pope, editor of Pope and Shakespeare, theological controversialist.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In 1760.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An intimate friend of George III's mother, he early gained an ascendancy over the young prince and was largely responsible for the king's autocratic views. He was hated in England both as a favorite and as a Scot.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Johnson's few political pamphlets in the 1770s invariably supported the policies of the Crown. The best known is his answer to the American colonies, "Taxation No Tyranny" (1775). His dislike of the Americans was in large part due to the fact that they held enslaved people.[Return to reference 5](#)

## [A MEMORABLE YEAR: BOSWELL MEETS JOHNSON]

[1763] This is to me a memorable year; for in it I had the happiness to obtain the acquaintance of that extraordinary man whose memoirs I am now writing; an acquaintance which I shall ever esteem as one of the most fortunate circumstances in my life. \* \* \*

Mr. Thomas Davies the actor, who then kept a bookseller's shop in Russel Street, Covent Garden, told me that Johnson was very much his friend, and came frequently to his house, where he more than once invited me to meet him; but by some unlucky accident or other he was prevented from coming to us. \* \* \*

At last, on Monday the 16th of May, when I was sitting in Mr. Davies's back parlor, after having drunk tea with him and Mrs. Davies, Johnson unexpectedly came into the shop; and Mr. Davies having perceived him through the glass door in the room in which we were sitting, advancing towards us—he announced his awful approach to me, somewhat in the manner of an actor in the part of Horatio, when he addresses Hamlet on the appearance of his father's ghost, "Look, my Lord, it comes." I found that I had a very perfect idea of Johnson's figure, from the portrait of him painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds soon after he had published his *Dictionary*, in the attitude of sitting in his easy chair in deep meditation, which was the first picture his friend did for him, which Sir Joshua very kindly presented to me, and from which an engraving has been made for this work. Mr. Davies mentioned my name, and respectfully introduced me to him. I was much agitated; and recollecting his prejudice against the Scotch, of which I had heard much, I said to Davies, "Don't tell where I come from."—"From Scotland," cried Davies roguishly. "Mr. Johnson," said I, "I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it." I am willing to flatter myself that I meant this as light pleasantry to soothe and conciliate him, and not as an humiliating abasement at the expense of my country. But however that might be, this speech was somewhat unlucky; for with that quickness of wit for which he was so remarkable, he seized the expression "come from Scotland," which I used in the sense of being

of that country; and, as if I had said that I had come away from it, or left it, retorted, "That, Sir, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help." This stroke stunned me a good deal; and when we had sat down, I felt myself not a little embarrassed, and apprehensive of what might come next. He then addressed himself to Davies: "What do you think of Garrick? He has refused me an order for the play for Miss Williams,<sup>6</sup> because he knows the house will be full, and that an order would be worth three shillings." Eager to take any opening to get into conversation with him, I ventured to say, "O Sir, I cannot think Mr. Garrick would grudge such a trifle to you." "Sir," said he, with a stern look, "I have known David Garrick longer than you have done: and I know no right you have to talk to me on the subject." Perhaps I deserved this check; for it was rather presumptuous in me, an entire stranger, to express any doubt of the justice of his animadversion upon his old acquaintance and pupil. I now felt myself much mortified, and began to think that the hope which I had long indulged of obtaining his acquaintance was blasted. And, in truth, had not my ardor been uncommonly strong, and my resolution uncommonly persevering, so rough a reception might have deterred me forever from making any further attempts. Fortunately, however, I remained upon the field not wholly discomfited. \* \* \*

I was highly pleased with the extraordinary vigor of his conversation, and regretted that I was drawn away from it by an engagement at another place. I had, for a part of the evening, been left alone with him, and had ventured to make an observation now and then, which he received very civilly; so that I was satisfied that though there was a roughness in his manner, there was no ill nature in his disposition. Davies followed me to the door, and when I complained to him a little of the hard blows which the great man had given me, he kindly took upon him to console me by saying, "Don't be uneasy. I can see he likes you very well."

A few days afterwards I called on Davies, and asked him if he thought I might take the liberty of waiting on Mr. Johnson at his chambers in the Temple. He said I certainly might, and that Mr.

Johnson would take it as a compliment. So upon Tuesday the 24th of May, after having been enlivened by the witty sallies of Messieurs Thornton, Wilkes, Churchill, and Lloyd,<sup>7</sup> with whom I had passed the morning, I boldly repaired to Johnson. His chambers were on the first floor of No. 1, Inner Temple Lane, and I entered them with an impression given me by the Reverend Dr. Blair,<sup>8</sup> of Edinburgh, who had been introduced to him not long before, and described his having "found the giant in his den"; an expression, which, when I came to be pretty well acquainted with Johnson, I repeated to him, and he was diverted at this picturesque account of himself. Dr. Blair had been presented to him by Dr. James Fordyce.<sup>9</sup> At this time the controversy concerning the pieces published by Mr. James Macpherson, as translations of *Ossian*, was at its height.<sup>1</sup> Johnson had all along denied their authenticity; and, what was still more provoking to their admirers, maintained that they had no merit. The subject having been introduced by Dr. Fordyce, Dr. Blair, relying on the internal evidence of their antiquity, asked Dr. Johnson whether he thought any man of a modern age could have written such poems? Johnson replied, "Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children." Johnson, at this time, did not know that Dr. Blair had just published a dissertation, not only defending their authenticity, but seriously ranking them with the poems of Homer and Virgil; and when he was afterwards informed of this circumstance, he expressed some displeasure at Dr. Fordyce's having suggested the topic, and said, "I am not sorry that they got thus much for their pains. Sir, it was like leading one to talk of a book when the author is concealed behind the door."

He received me very courteously; but, it must be confessed that his apartment, and furniture, and morning dress, were sufficiently uncouth. His brown suit of clothes looked very rusty; he had on a little old shriveled unpowdered wig, which was too small for his head; his shirt neck and knees of his breeches were loose; his black worsted stockings ill drawn up; and he had a pair of unbuckled shoes by way of slippers. But all these slovenly particularities were forgotten the moment that he began to talk. Some gentlemen,

whom I do not recollect, were sitting with him; and when they went away, I also rose; but he said to me, "Nay, don't go." "Sir," said I, "I am afraid that I intrude upon you. It is benevolent to allow me to sit and hear you." He seemed pleased with this compliment, which I sincerely paid him, and answered, "Sir, I am obliged to any man who visits me." I have preserved the following short minute of what passed this day:

"Madness frequently discovers itself merely by unnecessary deviation from the usual modes of the world. My poor friend Smart showed the disturbance of his mind by falling upon his knees, and saying his prayers in the street, or in any other unusual place. Now although, rationally speaking, it is greater madness not to pray at all than to pray as Smart did, I am afraid there are so many who do not pray, that their understanding is not called in question."

Concerning this unfortunate poet, Christopher Smart, who was confined in a madhouse, he had, at another time, the following conversation with Dr. Burney:<sup>2</sup> BURNEY. "How does poor Smart do, Sir; is he likely to recover?" JOHNSON. "It seems as if his mind had ceased to struggle with the disease; for he grows fat upon it." BURNEY. "Perhaps, Sir, that may be from want of exercise." JOHNSON. "No, Sir; he has partly as much exercise as he used to have, for he digs in the garden. Indeed, before his confinement, he used for exercise to walk to the ale house; but he was *carried* back again. I did not think he ought to be shut up. His infirmities were not noxious to society. He insisted on people praying with him; and I'd as lief pray with Kit Smart as anyone else. Another charge was that he did not love clean linen; and I have no passion for it."—Johnson continued. "Mankind have a great aversion to intellectual labor; but even supposing knowledge to be easily attainable, more people would be content to be ignorant than would take even a little trouble to acquire it."

Talking of Garrick, he said, "He is the first man in the world for sprightly conversation."

When I rose a second time he again pressed me to stay, which I did. \* \* \*



## Endnotes

- Note 6: Mrs. Anna Williams (1706–1783), a blind poet and friend of Mrs. Johnson. She continued to live in Johnson's house after his wife's death and habitually sat up to make tea for him whenever he came home.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Robert Lloyd, poet and essayist. Bonnell Thornton, journalist. Charles Churchill, satirist. These three, and John Wilkes, were bound together by a common love of wit and dissipation. Boswell enjoyed their company in 1763.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Reverend Hugh Blair (1718–1800), Scottish divine and professor of rhetoric and *belles lettres* at the University of Edinburgh.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A Scottish preacher.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: For the controversies surrounding Macpherson's claims to have translated poems from the original Gaelic of Ossian, a blind epic poet of the third century, see p. 922. The popularity of the poems both in Europe and in America was enormous.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dr. Charles Burney (1726–1814), historian of music and father of the novelist and diarist Frances Burney, whom Johnson befriended in his old age.[Return to reference 2](#)

[OSSIAN]

MR. BOSWELL TO DR. JOHNSON

Edinburgh, Feb. 2, 1775.

\* \* \* As to Macpherson, I am anxious to have from yourself a full and pointed account of what has passed between you and him. It is confidently told here that before your book<sup>3</sup> came out he sent to you, to let you know that he understood you meant to deny the authenticity of Ossian's poems; that the originals were in his possession; that you might have inspection of them, and might take the evidence of people skilled in the Erse language; and that he hoped, after this fair offer, you would not be so uncandid<sup>4</sup> as to assert that he had refused reasonable proof. That you paid no regard to his message, but published your strong attack upon him; and then he wrote a letter to you, in such terms as he thought suited to one who had not acted as a man of veracity. \* \* \*

What words were used by Mr. Macpherson in his letter to the venerable sage, I have never heard; but they are generally said to have been of a nature very different from the language of literary contest. Dr. Johnson's answer appeared in the newspapers of the day, and has since been frequently republished; but not with perfect accuracy. I give it as dictated to me by himself, written down in his presence, and authenticated by a note in his own handwriting, "*This, I think, is a true copy.*"

MR. JAMES MACPHERSON,

I received your foolish and impudent letter. Any violence offered me I shall do my best to repel; and what I cannot do for myself, the law shall do for me. I hope I shall never be

deterred from detecting what I think a cheat, by the menaces of a ruffian.

What would you have me retract? I thought your book an imposture; I think it an imposture still. For this opinion I have given my reasons to the public, which I here dare you to refute. Your rage I defy. Your abilities, since your Homer, are not so formidable; and what I hear of your morals inclines me to pay regard not to what you shall say, but to what you shall prove. You may print this if you will.

SAM. JOHNSON.

Mr. Macpherson little knew the character of Dr. Johnson if he supposed that he could be easily intimidated; for no man was ever more remarkable for personal courage. He had, indeed, an awful dread of death, or rather, "of something after death";<sup>5</sup> and what rational man, who seriously thinks of quitting all that he has ever known, and going into a new and unknown state of being, can be without that dread? But his fear was from reflection; his courage natural. His fear, in that one instance, was the result of philosophical and religious consideration. He feared death, but he feared nothing else, not even what might occasion death. Many instances of his resolution may be mentioned. One day, at Mr. Beauclerk's house in the country, when two large dogs were fighting, he went up to them, and beat them till they separated; and at another time, when told of the danger there was that a gun might burst if charged with many balls, he put in six or seven, and fired it off against a wall. Mr. Langton told me that when they were swimming together near Oxford, he cautioned Dr. Johnson against a pool which was reckoned particularly dangerous; upon which Johnson directly swam into it. He told me himself that one night he was attacked in the street by four men, to whom he would not yield, but kept them all at bay, till the watch came up, and carried both him and them to the roundhouse.<sup>6</sup> In the playhouse at Lichfield, as Mr. Garrick informed me, Johnson having for a moment quitted a chair which was placed for him between the side-scenes, a gentleman took possession of it, and

when Johnson on his return civilly demanded his seat, rudely refused to give it up; upon which Johnson laid hold of it, and tossed him and the chair into the pit. Foote, who so successfully revived the old comedy, by exhibiting living characters, had resolved to imitate Johnson on the stage, expecting great profits from his ridicule of so celebrated a man. Johnson being informed of his intention, and being at dinner at Mr. Thomas Davies's the bookseller, from whom I had the story, he asked Mr. Davies what was the common price of an oak stick; and being answered six-pence, "Why then, Sir," said he, "give me leave to send your servant to purchase me a shilling one. I'll have a double quantity; for I am told Foote means to *take me off*, as he calls it, and I am determined the fellow shall not do it with impunity." Davies took care to acquaint Foote of this, which effectually checked the wantonness of the mimic. Mr. Macpherson's menaces made Johnson provide himself with the same implement of defense; and had he been attacked, I have no doubt that, old as he was, he would have made his corporal prowess be felt as much as his intellectual. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands* (1775), in which he had publicly expressed his views on the Ossianic poems.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Unfair, malicious.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: *Hamlet* 3.1.80.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "The constable's prison, in which disorderly persons, found in the street, are confined" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)

### [JOHNSON FACES DEATH]

As Johnson had now very faint hopes of recovery, and as Mrs. Thrale was no longer devoted to him, it might have been supposed that he would naturally have chosen to remain in the comfortable house of his beloved wife's daughter,<sup>7</sup> and end his life where he began it. But there was in him an animated and lofty spirit, and however complicated diseases might depress ordinary mortals, all who saw him, beheld and acknowledged the *invictum animum Catonis*.<sup>8</sup> Such was his intellectual ardor even at this time that he said to one friend, "Sir, I look upon every day to be lost, in which I do not make a new acquaintance"; and to another, when talking of his illness, "I will be conquered; I will not capitulate." And such was his love of London, so high a relish had he of its magnificent extent, and variety of intellectual entertainment, that he languished when absent from it, his mind having become quite luxurious from the long habit of enjoying the metropolis; and, therefore, although at Lichfield, surrounded with friends, who loved and revered him, and for whom he had a very sincere affection, he still found that such conversation as London affords, could be found nowhere else. These feelings, joined, probably, to some flattering hopes of aid from the eminent physicians and surgeons in London, who kindly and generously attended him without accepting fees, made him resolve to return to the capital. \* \* \* Death had always been to him an object of terror; so that, though by no means happy, he still clung to life with an eagerness at which many have wondered. At any time when he was ill, he was very much pleased to be told that he looked better. An ingenious member of the Eumelian Club<sup>9</sup> informs me that upon one occasion when he said to him that he saw health returning to his cheek, Johnson seized him by the hand and exclaimed, "Sir, you are one of the kindest friends I ever had." \* \* \*

Dr. Heberden, Dr. Brocklesby, Dr. Warren, and Dr. Butter, physicians, generously attended him, without accepting any fees, as did Mr. Cruikshank, surgeon; and all that could be done from

professional skill and ability was tried, to prolong a life so truly valuable. He himself, indeed, having, on account of his very bad constitution, been perpetually applying himself to medical inquiries, united his own efforts with those of the gentlemen who attended him; and imagining that the dropsical collection of water which oppressed him might be drawn off by making incisions in his body, he, with his usual resolute defiance of pain, cut deep, when he thought that his surgeon had done it too tenderly.

About eight or ten days before his death, when Dr. Brocklesby paid him his morning visit, he seemed very low and desponding, and said, "I have been as a dying man all night." He then emphatically broke out in the words of Shakespeare:

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased;  
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,  
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,  
And with some sweet oblivious antidote  
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff  
Which weighs upon the heart?"

To which Dr. Brocklesby readily answered, from the same great poet:

"—Therein the patient  
Must minister to himself."<sup>[1](#)</sup>

Johnson expressed himself much satisfied with the application. \* \* \*

Amidst the melancholy clouds which hung over the dying Johnson, his characteristical manner showed itself on different occasions.

When Dr. Warren, in the usual style, hoped that he was better; his answer was, "No, Sir; you cannot conceive with what acceleration I advance towards death."

A man whom he had never seen before was employed one night to sit up with him. Being asked next morning how he liked his attendant, his answer was, "Not at all, Sir: the fellow's an idiot; he is

as awkward as a turnspit<sup>2</sup> when first put into the wheel, and as sleepy as a dormouse."

Mr. Windham<sup>3</sup> having placed a pillow conveniently to support him, he thanked him for his kindness, and said, "That will do—all that a pillow can do." \* \* \*

Johnson, with that native fortitude, which, amidst all his bodily distress and mental sufferings, never forsook him, asked Dr. Brocklesby, as a man in whom he had confidence, to tell him plainly whether he could recover. "Give me," said he, "a direct answer." The Doctor having first asked him if he could bear the whole truth, which way soever it might lead, and being answered that he could, declared that, in his opinion, he could not recover without a miracle. "Then," said Johnson, "I will take no more physic, not even my opiates; for I have prayed that I may render up my soul to God unclouded." In this resolution he persevered, and, at the same time, used only the weakest kinds of sustenance. Being pressed by Mr. Windham to take somewhat more generous nourishment, lest too low a diet should have the very effect which he dreaded, by debilitating his mind, he said, "I will take anything but inebriating sustenance."

The Reverend Mr. Strahan,<sup>4</sup> who was the son of his friend, and had been always one of his great favorites, had, during his last illness, the satisfaction of contributing to soothe and comfort him. That gentleman's house, at Islington, of which he is Vicar, afforded Johnson, occasionally and easily, an agreeable change of place and fresh air; and he attended also upon him in town in the discharge of the sacred offices of his profession.

Mr. Strahan has given me the agreeable assurance that, after being in much agitation, Johnson became quite composed, and continued so till his death.

Dr. Brocklesby, who will not be suspected of fanaticism, obliged me with the following account:

"For some time before his death, all his fears were calmed and absorbed by the prevalence of his faith, and his

trust in the merits and *propitiation* of Jesus Christ." \* \* \*

Johnson having thus in his mind the true Christian scheme, at once rational and consolatory, uniting justice and mercy in the Divinity, with the improvement of human nature, previous to his receiving the Holy Sacrament in his apartment, composed and fervently uttered this prayer:

"Almighty and most merciful Father, I am now as to human eyes, it seems, about to commemorate, for the last time, the death of thy Son Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer. Grant, O Lord, that my whole hope and confidence may be in his merits, and thy mercy; enforce and accept my imperfect repentance; make this commemoration available to the confirmation of my faith, the establishment of my hope, and the enlargement of my charity; and make the death of thy Son Jesus Christ effectual to my redemption. Have mercy upon me, and pardon the multitude of my offenses. Bless my friends; have mercy upon all men. Support me, by thy Holy Spirit, in the days of weakness, and at the hour of death; and receive me, at my death, to everlasting happiness, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen."

Having \* \* \* made his will on the 8th and 9th of December, and settled all his worldly affairs, he languished till Monday, the 13th of that month, when he expired, about seven o'clock in the evening, with so little apparent pain that his attendants hardly perceived when his dissolution took place. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

1791

- Note 7: Lucy Porter. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The unconquered soul of Cato (Latin). An adaptation of a phrase in Horace's *Odes* 2.1.24. [Return to reference 8](#)



- Note 9: A club to which Boswell and Reynolds belonged.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: *Macbeth* 5.3.40–46.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: “A dog kept to turn the roasting-spit by running within a tread-wheel connected to it” (*OED*).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: William Windham, one of Johnson’s younger friends, later a member of Parliament.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Reverend George Strahan (pronounced *Strawn*), who later published Johnson’s *Prayers and Meditations*.[Return to reference 4](#)

## **THOMAS GRAY**

### **1716–1771**

The man who wrote the English poem most loved by those whom Samuel Johnson called “the common reader” was a scholarly recluse who lived the quiet life of a university professor in the stagnant atmosphere of mid-eighteenth-century Cambridge. Born in London, Thomas Gray was the only one of twelve children to survive, and his family life was desperately unhappy. At eight he left home for Eton, where he made intimate friends: Richard West, a fellow poet; Thomas Ashton; and future novelist Horace Walpole, the son of the prime minister. After four years at Cambridge, Gray left without a degree to take the grand tour of France and Italy as Walpole’s guest. The death of West in 1742 desolated Gray, and memories of West haunt much of his verse. He spent the rest of his life in Cambridge, pursuing his studies and writing wonderful letters as well as a handful of poems. Two high-flown Pindaric odes, “The Progress of Poesy” (1754) and “The Bard” (1757), display his learning and his love of nature and the sublime.

Most of Gray’s poems take part in a contemporary reaction against the wit and satiric elegance of Pope’s couplets; poets sought a new style, at once intimate and prophetic. Gray was not easily satisfied; he constantly revised his poems and published very little. Because he held that “the language of the age is never the language of poetry,” he often uses archaic words and a word order borrowed from Latin, where a verb can precede its subject (as in line 35 of the

"Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard": "Awaits alike the inevitable hour"). But the "Elegy" stands alone in his work. It balances Latinate phrases with living English speech, and the learning of a scholar with a common humanity that everyone can share. Johnson, who did not usually like Gray's poetry, acknowledged that the "Elegy" would live on:

The Churchyard abounds with images that find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. The four stanzas beginning "Yet even these bones" are to me original: I have never seen the notions in any other place; yet he that reads them here, persuades himself that he has always felt them. Had Gray written often thus, it had been vain to blame, and useless to praise him.

# Ode on the Death of a Favorite Cat<sup>1</sup>

## *Drowned in a Tub of Goldfishes*

'Twas on a lofty vase's side,  
Where China's gayest art had dyed  
    The azure flowers that blow;<sup>o</sup>  
Demurest of the tabby kind,  
The pensive Selima reclined,  
5       Gazed on the lake below.

Her conscious tail her joy declared;  
The fair round face, the snowy beard,  
    The velvet of her paws,  
Her coat, that with the tortoise vies,  
10       Her ears of jet, and emerald eyes,  
She saw; and purred applause.

Still had she gazed; but 'midst the tide  
Two angel forms were seen to glide,  
    The genii of the stream:  
15       Their scaly armor's Tyrian<sup>o</sup> hue  
Through richest purple to the view  
    Betrayed a golden gleam.

The hapless nymph with wonder saw:  
A whisker first and then a claw,  
20       With many an ardent wish,  
She stretched in vain to reach the prize.  
What female heart can gold despise?  
    What cat's averse to fish?

25       Presumptuous maid! with looks intent

Again she stretched, again she bent,  
 Nor knew the gulf between.  
 (Malignant Fate sat by and smiled)  
 The slippery verge her feet beguiled,  
 She tumbled headlong in.  
 30  
 Eight times emerging from the flood  
 She mewed to every watery god,  
 Some speedy aid to send.  
 No dolphin came, no nereid<sup>o</sup> stirred:  
 35 Nor cruel Tom, nor Susan<sup>2</sup> heard.  
 A favorite has no friend!  
 From hence, ye beauties, undeceived,  
 Know, one false step is ne'er retrieved,  
 And be with caution bold.  
 40 Not all that tempts your wandering eyes  
 And heedless hearts is lawful prize;  
 Nor all that glisters gold.

## 1747 **Endnotes**

1748

- Note 1: Selima, one of Horace Walpole's cats, had recently drowned in a large china vessel. Gray wrote this memorial at Walpole's request. For an illustration of this poem by William Blake, See the Image Gallery for this volume. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Servants' names. [Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *bloom* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *purple* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sea nymph* [Return to reference °](#)

# Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

The curfew<sup>1</sup> tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,  
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

5 Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,  
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,  
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,  
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

10 Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower  
The moping owl does to the moon complain  
Of such, as wandering near her secret bower,  
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

15 Beneath those rugged elms, that yew tree's shade,  
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,  
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,  
The rude<sup>o</sup> forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

20 The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,  
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,  
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,<sup>o</sup>  
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

25 For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,  
Or busy housewife ply her evening care;  
No children run to lisp<sup>o</sup> their sire's return,  
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,  
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe<sup>o</sup> has broke;

How jocund did they drive their team afield!  
How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy  
stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,  
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;  
30 Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile  
The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry,<sup>o</sup> the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
35 Awaits alike the inevitable hour.  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,  
If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies<sup>2</sup> raise,  
Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted<sup>3</sup>  
vault  
40 The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn<sup>4</sup> or animated<sup>o</sup> bust  
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?  
Can Honor's voice provoke<sup>o</sup> the silent dust,  
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid  
45 Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;  
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,<sup>o</sup>  
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page  
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;  
50 Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,<sup>o</sup>  
And froze the genial<sup>o</sup> current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,

55           The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
          And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

          Some village Hampden,<sup>5</sup> that with dauntless breast  
          The little tyrant of his fields withstood;  
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,  
60           Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

          The applause of listening senates to command,  
          The threats of pain and ruin to despise,  
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,  
          And read their history in a nation's eyes,

65           Their lot forbade: nor circumscribed alone  
          Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;  
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,  
          And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

          The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,  
          To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,  
70           Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride  
          With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

          Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,  
          Their sober wishes never learned to stray;  
75           Along the cool sequestered vale of life  
          They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

          Yet even these bones from insult to protect  
          Some frail memorial still erected nigh,  
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture  
          decked,<sup>6</sup>  
80           Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.



Their name, their years, spelt by the unlettered  
Muse,

The place of fame and elegy supply:  
And many a holy text around she strews,  
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

85 For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,  
This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,  
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?

90 On some fond breast the parting soul relies,  
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;  
Even from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,  
Even in our ashes live their wonted fires.

95 For thee, who mindful of the unhonored dead  
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;  
If chance, o by lonely contemplation led,  
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,

Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,  
"Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn  
Brushing with hasty steps the dew away  
100 To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.

"There at the foot of yonder nodding beech  
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,  
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,  
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

105 "Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,  
Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove,  
Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,  
Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love.

"One morn I missed him on the customed hill,

110       Along the heath and near his favorite tree;  
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,  
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;  
  
"The next with dirges due in sad array  
Slow through the churchway path we saw him  
borne.  
115       Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay,  
Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn."

### ***The Epitaph***

*Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth  
A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.  
Fair Science<sup>o</sup> frowned not on his humble birth,  
And Melancholy marked him for her own.*  
120  
*Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:  
He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,  
He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wished) a  
friend.*  
  
125       *No farther seek his merits to disclose,  
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode  
(There they alike in trembling hope repose),  
The bosom of his Father and his God.*

ca. 1742–50

## **Endnotes**

1751

- Note 1: A bell rung in the evening.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An ornamental or symbolic group of figures depicting the achievements of the deceased.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Decorated with intersecting lines in relief.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: A funeral urn with an epitaph or pictured story inscribed on it.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Hampden (1594–1643), who, both as a private citizen and as a member of Parliament, zealously defended the rights of the people against the autocratic policies of Charles I.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Compare “storied urn or animated bust” dedicated inside the church to “the proud” (line 41).[Return to reference 6](#)

## Notes

- °: *uneducated*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hunter’s horn*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *imperfectly report*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *soil*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *noble birth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lifelike*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *call forth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wielded*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inspiration*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *creative*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *perchance*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Learning*[Return to reference °](#)

# Sonnet on the Death of Mr. Richard West<sup>1</sup>

In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,  
And reddening Phoebus<sup>2</sup> lifts his golden fire:  
The birds in vain their amorous descant<sup>3</sup> join;  
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire:  
5 These ears, alas! for other notes repine,  
A different object do these eyes require.  
My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;  
And in my breast the imperfect joys expire.  
Yet morning smiles the busy race to cheer,  
And new-born pleasure brings to happier men:  
10 The fields to all their wonted<sup>o</sup> tribute bear:  
To warm their little loves the birds complain:  
I fruitless mourn to him, that cannot hear,  
And weep the more, because I weep in vain.

1742 **Endnotes**

1775

- Note 1: This poem appears in Gray's commonplace book and was published only posthumously. West, Gray's school friend, died at twenty-five years old. Earlier, West had sent Gray a poem imagining the aftermath of his own death: "nature" will not "take notice," and "Bright as before the day-star will appear, / The fields as verdant, and the skies as clear." [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The god of light, a personified sun. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Song, in an echo of *Paradise Lost* 4.603: the nightingale, "her amorous descant sung." [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *usual* [Return to reference °](#)

# The Bard<sup>1</sup>

## *A Pindaric Ode.*<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1

"Ruin seize thee, ruthless King!<sup>3</sup>  
Confusion on thy banners wait,  
Though fanned by Conquest's crimson wing  
They mock the air with idle state.  
5 Helm,<sup>o</sup> nor hauberk's twisted mail,<sup>4</sup>  
Nor even thy virtues, tyrant, shall avail  
To save thy secret soul from nightly fears,  
From Cambria's<sup>o</sup> curse, from Cambria's tears!"  
Such were the sounds, that o'er the crested<sup>5</sup> pride  
Of the first Edward scattered wild dismay,  
10 As down the steep of Snowdon's<sup>6</sup> shaggy side  
He wound with toilsome march his long array.  
Stout Glo'ster stood aghast in speechless trance:  
To arms! cried Mortimer, and couched<sup>7</sup> his quivering  
lance.

### 1.2

15 On a rock, whose haughty<sup>o</sup> brow  
Frowns o'er old Conway's<sup>8</sup> foaming flood,  
Robed in the sable garb of woe,  
With haggard eyes the poet stood;  
(Loose his beard, and hoary<sup>o</sup> hair<sup>9</sup>  
Streamed, like a meteor, to the troubled air)  
20 And with a master's hand, and prophet's fire,

Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.  
"Hark, how each giant oak, and desert cave,  
Sighs to the torrent's awful<sup>o</sup> voice beneath!  
O'er thee, O King! their hundred arms they wave,  
25 Revenge on thee in hoarser murmurs breathe;  
Vocal no more, since Cambria's fatal day,  
To high-born Hoel's harp, or soft Llewellyn's lay.<sup>1</sup>"

### 1.3

"Cold is Cadwallo's tongue,  
That hushed the stormy main:<sup>o</sup>  
30 Brave Urien sleeps upon his craggy bed:  
Mountains, ye mourn in vain  
Modred, whose magic song  
Made huge Plinlimmon<sup>2</sup> bow his cloud-topped head.  
On dreary Arvon's shore<sup>3</sup> they lie,  
35 Smeared with gore, and ghastly pale:  
Far, far aloof th' affrighted ravens sail;  
The famished eagle<sup>4</sup> screams, and passes by.  
Dear lost companions of my tuneful art,  
Dear, as the light that visits these sad eyes,  
40 Dear, as the ruddy drops that warm my heart,  
Ye died amidst your dying country's cries—  
No more I weep. They do not sleep.  
On yonder cliffs, a grisly band,  
I see them sit, they linger yet,  
45 Avengers of their native land:  
With me in dreadful harmony they join,  
And weave with bloody hands the tissue<sup>5</sup> of thy line."

### 2.1

"Weave the warp, and weave the woof,<sup>6</sup>  
The winding sheet<sup>7</sup> of Edward's race.

50 Give ample room, and verge enough  
The characters of hell to trace.  
Mark the year, and mark the night,  
When Severn shall re-echo with affright  
55 The shrieks of death, through Berkeley's roofs that  
ring,  
Shrieks of an agonizing King!<sup>8</sup>  
She-Wolf of France,<sup>9</sup> with unrelenting fangs,  
That tear'st the bowels of thy mangled mate,  
From thee be born, who o'er thy country hangs  
60 The scourge of Heav'n.<sup>1</sup> What terrors round him  
wait!  
Amazement in his van,<sup>o</sup> with Flight combined,  
And Sorrow's faded form, and Solitude behind.' "

## 2.2

"Mighty victor, mighty lord,  
Low on his funeral couch he lies!<sup>2</sup>  
65 No pitying heart, no eye, afford  
A tear to grace his obsequies.<sup>o</sup>  
Is the sable warrior<sup>3</sup> fled?  
Thy son is gone. He rests among the dead.  
The swarm, that in thy noon-tide beam were born?  
Gone to salute the rising morn.  
70 Fair laughs the morn,<sup>4</sup> and soft the zephyr blows,  
While proudly riding o'er the azure realm  
In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes;  
Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the helm;  
75 Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind's sway,  
That, hushed in grim repose, expects his evening  
prey.' "

## 2.3



"Fill high the sparkling bowl,  
 The rich repast prepare,  
 Reft<sup>o</sup> of a crown, he yet may share the feast:<sup>5</sup>  
 Close by the regal chair  
 80 Fell<sup>o</sup> Thirst and Famine scowl  
 A baleful smile upon their baffled guest.  
 Heard ye the din of battle bray,  
 Lance to lance, and horse to horse?<sup>6</sup>  
 Long years of havoc urge their destined course,  
 85 And through the kindred squadrons mow their way.  
 Ye towers of Julius,<sup>7</sup> London's lasting shame,  
 With many a foul and midnight murder fed,  
 Revere his consort's faith, his father's fame,  
 And spare the meek usurper's<sup>8</sup> holy head.  
 90 Above, below, the rose of snow,  
 Twined with her blushing foe,<sup>9</sup> we spread:  
 The bristled boar in infant gore<sup>1</sup>  
 Wallows beneath the thorny shade.  
 Now, brothers, bending o'er th' accurséd loom  
 95 Stamp we our vengeance deep, and ratify his doom.'  
 "

### 3.1

"Edward, lo! to sudden fate  
 (Weave we the woof. The thread is spun)  
 Half of thy heart we consecrate.<sup>2</sup>  
 (The web is wove. The work is done.)'  
 100 Stay, oh stay!<sup>3</sup> nor thus forlorn  
 Leave me unblessed, unpitied, here to mourn:  
 In yon bright track, that fires the western skies,  
 They melt, they vanish from my eyes.  
 But oh! what solemn scenes on Snowdon's height  
 105 Descending slow their glitt'ring skirts unroll?  
 Visions of glory, spare my aching sight,

Ye unborn ages, crowd not on my soul!  
No more our long-lost Arthur we bewail.<sup>4</sup>  
All hail, ye genuine kings, Britannia's issue,<sup>5</sup> hail."

### 3.2

"Girt<sup>o</sup> with many a baron bold  
Sublime their starry fronts they rear;  
And gorgeous dames, and statesmen old  
In bearded majesty, appear.  
In the midst a form divine!  
Her eye proclaims her of the Briton-line;  
Her lion-port, her awe-commanding face,  
Attempered sweet to virgin grace.<sup>6</sup>  
What strings symphonious tremble in the air,  
What strings of vocal transport round her play!  
Hear from the grave, great Taliesin,<sup>7</sup> hear;  
They breathe a soul to animate thy clay.  
Bright Rapture calls, and soaring, as she sings,  
Waves in the eye of Heav'n her many-colored wings."

### 3.3

"The verse adorn again  
Fierce War, and faithful Love,<sup>8</sup>  
And Truth severe, by fairy Fiction drest.  
In buskined measures move  
Pale Grief, and pleasing Pain,  
With Horror, tyrant of the throbbing breast.<sup>9</sup>  
A voice, as of the cherub-choir,  
Gales from blooming Eden bear;<sup>1</sup>  
And distant warblings lessen on my ear,  
That lost in long futurity expire.<sup>2</sup>

135

Fond<sup>o</sup> impious man, think'st thou, yon sanguine<sup>o</sup>  
cloud,  
Raised by thy breath, has quenched the orb of day?  
Tomorrow he<sup>o</sup> repairs the golden flood,  
And warms the nations with redoubled ray.  
Enough for me: with joy I see  
The different doom our Fates assign.<sup>3</sup>  
140 Be thine despair, and scepter'd care,  
To triumph, and to die, are mine."  
He spoke, and headlong from the mountain's height  
Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night.

1757 **Endnotes** 1768

- Note 1: Gray prefaced the poem: "The following ode is founded on a tradition current in Wales, that Edward the First, when he completed the conquest of that country, ordered all the bards, that fell into his hands, to be put to death." English king Edward I (1239–1307) won a major victory to subjugate the Welsh in 1283; his decrees against bards were not so directly violent, but Gray uses this "tradition" to link prophetic poetry with a lost Celtic past (in contrast to both Englishness and modernity). Gray first published the poem in 1757 and in 1768 was convinced to help readers by adding learned explanatory notes, some of which are reproduced here. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An irregular ode, often associated with intense emotion. Gray draws on period (mis-)understandings of the Greek poet Pindar's form, organizing his poem into clusters of three movements called strophe, antistrophe, epode. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The voice of the last Welsh bard, cursing Edward I and his incoming English troops. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The hauberk was a texture of steel ringlets, or rings interwoven, forming a coat of mail, that sat close to the body,

and adapted itself to every motion [*Gray's note*].[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Ornamented (with plumes).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Snowdon was a name given by the Saxons to that mountainous tract, which the Welsh themselves call *Craigian-eryri*: it included all the highlands of Caernarvonshire and Merionethshire, as far east as the river Conway [*from Gray's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "To fix the spear . . . in the posture of attack" (Johnson's *Dictionary*). "Glo[uce]ster" and "Mortimer": Gray's note explains, two English lords "whose lands lay on the borders of Wales," likely with "the King in this expedition."[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Anglicized version of Conwy, a river in northern Wales.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The image was taken from a well-known picture of Raphaël, representing the Supreme Being in the vision of Ezekiel [*from Gray's note*]. Raphael, or Raffaello Santi (1483–1520), was a famous Italian painter.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The last bard starts listing bards who had fallen victim to Edward. This continues into the next stanza. (Gray imagines some of these characters, though the names are Welsh.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A mountain in Wales.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The shores of Caernarvonshire opposite to the isle of Anglesey [*Gray's note*]. Today this area is in Gwynedd county, Wales.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Citing works of geography and science, Gray notes, "eagles used annually to build their aerie among the rocks of Snowdon, which from thence (as some think) were named by the Welch Craigian-eryri, or the crags of the eagles. At this day (I am told) the highest point of Snowdon is called the eagle's nest."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Fine woven cloth. The poem imagines prophecy as weaving, spinning future fates.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: The dead bards join their voices to the speaker's in a chorus, lines 49–100, that prophesies doom for Edward's descendants. "Warp" and "woof" are the threads that are woven together, interlocking, to make fabric.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: To wrap the dead.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Edward the Second, cruelly butchered in Berkely-Castle [*Gray's note*]. King Edward's son was murdered at the castle near the Severn River in 1327.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Isabel of France, Edward the Second's adulterous Queen [*Gray's note*]. The French-born Isabella (1295–1358) conspired to depose and (some thought) murder her husband.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Triumphs of Edward the Third in France [*Gray's note*]. He becomes the English "scourge" of his mother's country.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Death of that King, abandoned by his children, and even robbed in his last moments by his courtiers and his mistress [*Gray's note*]. Edward III died in 1377.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Edward, the Black Prince, dead some time before his father [*Gray's note*]. Edward III's would-be heir died the year before his father, in 1376.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Magnificence of Richard the Second's reign [*from Gray's note*]. Richard II (Edward III's grandson) became king in 1377, at ten years old.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Richard the Second . . . was starved to death [*from Gray's note*]. He died in 1400, overthrown by the man who became Henry IV.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The descendants of two of Edward III's sons, the Dukes of York and Lancaster, fought the Wars of the Roses (1455–85).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Henry the Sixth, George Duke of Clarence, Edward the Fifth, Richard Duke of York, etc. believed to be murdered secretly in the Tower of London. The oldest part of that structure is vulgarly attributed to Julius Caesar [*Gray's note*].[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Henry VI, whose “line of Lancaster had no right of inheritance to the throne,” Gray’s note explains. Henry was killed in 1471. “Consort”: his wife, Margaret of Anjou. “Father”: Henry V.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The white and red roses, devices of York and Lancaster [*Gray’s note*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The silver boar was the badge of Richard the Third; whence he was usually known in his own time by the name of *the Boar* [*Gray’s note*]. Richard III (1452–1485) was said to have murdered the young princes, who threatened him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Doom. Addressing Edward I directly, the bards foretell the death of his wife, Eleanor of Castile, in 1290 (“a few years after the conquest of Wales,” Gray’s note explains).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: After the chorus of dead bards concludes, the living bard begs their continued presence before offering his own prophecy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: It was the common belief of the Welch nation, that King Arthur was still alive in Fairy-Land, and should return again to reign over Britain [*Gray’s note*].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Gray’s note points to prophecies that the Welsh “should regain their sovereignty over this island”—which “seemed to be accomplished” with the crowning in 1485 of the first Tudor, a family with Welsh roots.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603). Gray quotes a historical description of her as “lion-like.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Taliesin, chief of the bards, flourished in the VIth century [*from Gray’s note*]. Because Elizabeth secures peace without tyranny, poetry flourishes again.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: “Fierce wars and faithful loves shall moralize my song,” Spenser’s Proëme to the *Fairy Queen* [*Gray’s note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Shakespeare [*Gray’s note*]. “Buskined”: alluding to shoes worn onstage by ancient actors.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Milton [*Gray’s note*].[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The succession of poets after Milton's time [*Gray's note*]. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, he has seen the downfall of Edward I's English line, its replacement by the Welsh Tudors, and the future flourishing of poetry. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *helmet* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Wales's* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *proud, lofty* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *white or gray* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *awe-inspiring* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sea* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in front of the group* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *funeral rites* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bereft* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *destructive* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *encircled* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foolish* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *blood-colored* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the sun* [Return to reference °](#)

# **WILLIAM COLLINS**

## **1721–1759**

William Collins was born in Chichester and was educated at Winchester and Oxford. Coming up to London from the university, he tried to establish himself as an author, but he was given rather to planning than to writing books. He came to know Samuel Johnson, who later remembered him affectionately as a man of learning who “loved fairies, genii, giants, and monsters” and who “delighted to rove through the meanders of enchantment.” In 1746 Collins published his *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects*, his part in an undertaking, with his friend Joseph Warton, to create a new poetry, more lyrical and fanciful than that of Alexander Pope’s generation. Collins’s *Odes* address personified abstractions (Fear, Pity, the Passions), which are imagined as vivid presences that overwhelm the poet as he calls them to life. In form, these poems represent a new version of the classical Great Ode, derived from the Greek poet Pindar (ca. 522–ca. 443 B.C.E.), which treats lofty themes in an elevated style; Collins returned to Pindar’s regularity of structure, after the relative freedom of most English odes written in preceding decades. But the originality of the *Odes* lies in their intensity of vision, which risks obscurity in quest of the sublime.

To his disappointment, contemporaries preferred his early *Persian Eclogues* to the more difficult *Odes*. Inheriting some money, the poet traveled for a while, but fits of depression gradually deepened into total debility. He spent his last years in Chichester, forgotten by all



but a small circle of loyal friends. As the century progressed he gained in reputation. The Romantics admired his poems and felt akin to him. Coleridge said that "Ode on the Poetical Character" "has inspired and whirled me along with greater agitations of enthusiasm than any the most *impassioned* scene in Schiller or Shakespeare."

# Ode to Evening<sup>1</sup>

If aught of oaten stop,<sup>2</sup> or pastoral song,  
May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,  
Like thy own solemn springs,  
Thy springs and dying gales,  
5 O nymph reserved, while now the bright-haired sun  
Sits in yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts,  
With brede<sup>o</sup> ethereal wove,  
O'erhang his wavy bed:  
Now air is hushed, save where the weak-eyed bat,  
10 With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing,  
Or where the beetle winds  
His small but sullen horn,  
As oft he rises 'midst the twilight path,  
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum:  
Now teach me, maid composed,  
15 To breathe some softened strain,  
Whose numbers,<sup>o</sup> stealing through thy darkening  
vale,  
May not unseemly with its stillness suit,  
As, musing slow, I hail  
Thy genial<sup>o</sup> loved return!  
20 For when thy folding-star<sup>3</sup> arising shows  
His paly circlet, at his warning lamp  
The fragrant Hours, and elves  
Who slept in flowers the day,  
And many a nymph who wreaths her brows with  
25 sedge,  
And sheds the freshening dew, and, lovelier still,  
The pensive Pleasures sweet,  
Prepare thy shadowy car.

Then lead, calm vot'ress, where some sheety lake  
 Cheers the lone heath, or some time-hallowed pile  
 30 Or upland fallows gray  
 Reflect its last cool gleam.  
 But when chill blustering winds, or driving rain,  
 Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut  
 That from the mountain's side  
 35 Views wilds, and swelling floods,  
 And hamlets brown, and dim-discovered spires,  
 And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all  
 Thy dewy fingers draw  
 The gradual dusky veil.  
 40 While Spring shall pour his showers, as oft he wont,  
 And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve;  
 While Summer loves to sport  
 Beneath thy lingering light;  
 While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves;  
 45 Or Winter, yelling through the troublous air,  
 Affrights thy shrinking train,  
 And rudely rends thy robes;  
 So long, sure-found beneath the sylvan shed,  
 Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, rose-lipped Health,  
 50 Thy gentlest influence own,  
 And hymn thy favorite name!

## Endnotes

1746, 1748

- Note 1: Collins borrowed the metrical structure and the rhymeless lines of this ode from Milton's translation of Horace, *Odes* 1.5 (1673). The text printed here is based on the revised version, published in Dodsley's *Miscellany* (1748). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Finger hole in a shepherd's flute. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The evening star, which signals the hour for herding the sheep into the sheepfold. [Return to reference 3](#)

# Notes

- °: *embroidery*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *measures*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *life-giving*[Return to reference](#) °

# CHRISTOPHER SMART

## 1722–1771

In 1756 Christopher Smart, who had won prizes at Pembroke College, Cambridge, as a scholar and poet and was known in London as a wit and bon vivant, was seized by religious mania: “a preternatural excitement to prayer,” according to Hester Thrale, “which he held it as a duty not to control or repress.” If Smart had been content to pray in private, his life might have ended as happily as it began, but he insisted on kneeling down in the streets, in parks, and in assembly rooms. He became a public nuisance, and the public took its revenge. For most of the next seven years Smart was confined, first in St. Luke’s hospital, then in a private asylum. There, severed from his wife, his children, and his friends, he began to write a bold new sort of poetry: vivid, concise, abrupt, syntactically daring. Few of his contemporaries noticed it. After Smart’s release from the institution (1763) he fell into debt—he had always been profligate—and his masterpiece, *A Song to David* (1763), was almost completely ignored. He died, forgotten, in a debtor’s prison. But in the nineteenth century his reputation revived, and with the publication of *Jubilate Agno* in 1939 his poems became newly famous.

*Jubilate Agno (Rejoice in the Lamb)*, written a few lines at a time during Smart’s confinement, is (1) a record of his daily life and thoughts; (2) the notebook of a scholar, crammed with puns and obscure learning, which sets out elaborate correspondences between

the world of the Bible and modern England; and (3) a personal testament or book of worship, antiphonally arranged in lines beginning alternately with *Let* and *For*, which seeks to join the material and spiritual universes in one unending prayer. It has also come to be recognized, since first published in 1939 by W. F. Stead, as a poem—a poem unique in English for its ecstatic sense of the presence of the divine spirit. The most famous passage describes Smart's cat, Jeffery, his only companion during the years of confinement: "For I am possessed of a cat, surpassing in beauty, from whom I take occasion to bless Almighty God." At once a real cat, lovingly observed in all its frisks, and visible evidence of the providential plan, Jeffery celebrates the Maker, as all things do, in his very being.

# ***From Jubilate Agno***

## **[MY CAT JEOFFRY]**

For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry.  
For he is the servant of the Living God duly and daily  
serving him.  
For at the first glance of the glory of God in the  
East<sup>o</sup> he worships in his way.  
For is this done by wreathing his body seven times  
round with elegant quickness.  
5 For then he leaps up to catch the musk, w<sup>ch</sup> is the  
blessing of God upon his prayer.  
For he rolls upon prank<sup>o</sup> to work it in.  
For having done duty and received blessing he  
begins to consider himself.  
For this he performs in ten degrees.  
For first he looks upon his fore-paws to see if they  
are clean.  
10 For secondly he kicks up behind to clear away there.  
For thirdly he works it upon stretch with the fore-  
paws extended.  
For fourthly he sharpens his paws by wood.  
For fifthly he washes himself.  
For Sixthly he rolls upon wash.  
For Seventhly he fleas himself, that he may not be  
15 interrupted upon the beat.  
For Eighthly he rubs himself against a post.  
For Ninthly he looks up for his instructions.  
For Tenthly he goes in quest of food.  
For having consider'd God and himself he will  
consider his neighbor.

20 For if he meets another cat he will kiss her in  
kindness.  
For when he takes his prey he plays with it to give it  
a chance.  
For one mouse in seven escapes by his dallying.  
For when his day's work is done his business more  
properly begins.  
For he keeps the Lord's watch in the night against  
the adversary.  
25 For he counteracts the powers of darkness by his  
electrical skin & glaring eyes.  
For he counteracts the Devil, who is death, by  
brisking about the life.  
For in his morning orisons he loves the sun and the  
sun loves him.  
For he is of the tribe of Tiger.  
For the Cherub Cat is a term of the Angel Tiger.<sup>1</sup>  
30 For he has the subtlety and hissing of a serpent,  
which in goodness he suppresses.  
For he will not do destruction if he is well-fed,  
neither will he spit without provocation.  
For he purrs in thankfulness, when God tells him he's  
a good Cat.  
For he is an instrument for the children to learn  
benevolence upon.  
For every house is incomplete without him & a  
blessing is lacking in the spirit.  
35 For the Lord commanded Moses concerning the cats  
at the departure of the Children of Israel from  
Egypt.<sup>2</sup>  
For every family had one cat at least in the bag.  
For the English Cats are the best in Europe.  
For he is the cleanest in the use of his fore-paws of  
any quadrupede.



For the dexterity of his defence is an instance of the  
love of God to him exceedingly.  
40 For he is the quickest to his mark of any creature.  
For he is tenacious of his point.  
For he is a mixture of gravity and waggery.  
For he knows that God is his Saviour.  
For there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at  
rest.  
45 For there is nothing brisker than his life when in  
motion.  
For he is of the Lord's poor and so indeed is he  
called by benevolence perpetually—Poor Jeoffry!  
poor Jeoffry! the rat has bit thy throat.  
For I bless the name of the Lord Jesus that Jeoffry is  
better.  
For the divine spirit comes about his body to sustain  
it in compleat cat.  
For his tongue is exceeding pure so that it has in  
purity what it wants in music.  
50 For he is docile and can learn certain things.  
For he can set up with gravity which is patience  
upon approbation.  
For he can fetch and carry, which is patience in  
employment.  
For he can jump over a stick which is patience upon  
proof positive.  
For he can spraggle upon waggle<sup>3</sup> at the word of  
command.  
55 For he can jump from an eminence into his master's  
bosom.  
For he can catch the cork and toss it again.  
For he is hated by the hypocrite and miser.  
For the former is afraid of detection.  
For the latter refuses the charge.

For he camels his back to bear the first notion of  
business.  
For he is good to think on, if a man would express  
himself neatly.  
For he made a great figure in Egypt for his signal  
services.  
For he killed the Icneumon-rat very pernicious by  
land.<sup>4</sup>  
For his ears are so acute that they sting again.  
For from this proceeds the passing<sup>o</sup> quickness of his  
65 attention.  
For by stroking of him I have found out electricity.  
For I perceived God's light about him both wax and  
fire.  
For the Electrical fire is the spiritual substance, which  
God sends from heaven to sustain the bodies both  
of man and beast.  
For God has blessed him in the variety of his  
movements.  
70 For, though he cannot fly, he is an excellent  
clamberer.  
For his motions upon the face of the earth are more  
than any other quadrupede.  
For he can tread to all the measures upon the music.  
For he can swim for life.  
For he can creep.

## 1759–63 **Endnotes**

1939

- Note 1: As a cherub is a small angel, so a cat is a small tiger.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: No cats are mentioned in the Bible.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: He can sprawl when his master waggles a finger or stick.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The ichneumon, which resembles a weasel, was venerated and domesticated by the ancient Egyptians.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *sunrise*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *prankishly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *surpassing*[Return to reference °](#)

# **OLIVER GOLDSMITH**

## **ca. 1730–1774**

Oliver Goldsmith was born in Ireland, the son of an Anglican clergyman whose geniality he inherited and whose improvidence he imitated. Disfigured by smallpox, he grew up homely, ungainly, apparently stupid, and certainly idle. Nonetheless, he was sent to Trinity College, Dublin, as a sizar—that is, a student who did menial jobs for well-to-do undergraduates—and took his B.A. in 1749. After studying medicine at the University of Edinburgh he wandered for a while on the Continent, visiting Holland, France, Italy, and Switzerland. He returned to England in 1756 with a mysteriously acquired M.D. and tried in vain to support himself as a physician among the poor in the London borough of Southwark. Eventually he drifted into the profession of hack writer for Ralph Griffiths, the proprietor of the *Monthly Review*, and later worked for and with the benevolent publisher John Newbery. His first success, *An Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759), attributes the decline of the fine arts in mid-eighteenth-century Europe to the lack of enlightened patronage and to the malign influence of criticism and scholarship. Soon he became a famous author and an intimate of the brilliant circle around Samuel Johnson. Although his writings brought in a great deal of money, extravagance and generosity kept him always in debt. He died owing the prodigious sum (for a man whose only source of income was writing) of £2000.

The variety and excellence of Goldsmith's work are astonishing. His easy and pleasant prose style and shrewd observations of character and scene enliven his essays, especially those in the series *The Citizen of the World* (1762; see [p. 335](#)), and his popular novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). Two plays, *The Good-Natured Man* (1768) and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), achieve a sort of hearty and mirthful comedy—unspoiled by the fashionable sentimentality of the moment—that is unique in the century. His two major poems, *The Traveler, or A Prospect of Society* (1764) and *The Deserted Village*, are distinguished for the unforced grace of their couplets and for an air of simplicity that is far from simple to achieve.

# The Deserted Village<sup>1</sup>

Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain,  
Where health and plenty cheered the laboring swain,  
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,  
And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed:  
5 Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,  
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please,  
How often have I loitered o'er thy green,  
Where humble happiness endeared each scene;  
How often have I paused on every charm,  
10 The sheltered cot,<sup>o</sup> the cultivated farm,  
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,  
The decent church that topped the neighboring hill,  
The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,  
For talking age and whispering lovers made;  
How often have I blessed the coming day,<sup>o</sup>  
15 When toil remitting lent its turn to play,  
And all the village train, from labor free,  
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree,  
While many a pastime circled in the shade,  
The young contending as the old surveyed;  
20 And many a gambol frolicked o'er the ground,  
And sleights of art and feats of strength went round;  
And still as each repeated pleasure tired,  
Succeeding sports the mirthful band inspired;  
The dancing pair that simply sought renown,  
25 By holding out to tire each other down;  
The swain mistrustless of his smuttred face,  
While secret laughter tittered round the place;  
The bashful virgin's sidelong looks of love,  
The matron's glance that would those looks reprove:  
30

These were thy charms, sweet village! sports like  
these,  
With sweet succession, taught even toil to please;  
These round thy bowers their cheerful influence shed,  
These were thy charms—But all these charms are  
fled.

35

Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,  
Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn;  
Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen,  
And desolation saddens all thy green:  
One only master grasps the whole domain,



Thomas Gainsborough, *The Cottage Door*, ca. 1778. Gainsborough painted several versions of

this idealized view of home, motherhood, and childhood as experienced by peasants in rural Britain.

---

40 And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain;  
No more thy glassy brook reflects the day,  
But choked with sedges, works its weedy way;  
Along thy glades, a solitary guest,  
The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest;  
45 Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,  
And tires their echoes with unvaried cries.  
Sunk are thy bowers, in shapeless ruin all,  
And the long grass o'ertops the moldering wall;  
And trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,  
50 Far, far away thy children leave the land.  
    Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;  
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;  
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;  
55 But a bold peasantry, their country's pride.  
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.  
    A time there was, ere England's griefs began,  
When every rood<sup>o</sup> of ground maintained its man;  
For him light labor spread her wholesome store,  
Just gave what life required, but gave no more:  
60 His best companions, innocence and health;  
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.  
    But times are altered; Trade's unfeeling train  
Usurp the land and dispossess the swain;  
Along the lawn, where scattered hamlets rose,  
65 Unwieldy wealth, and cumbrous<sup>o</sup> pomp repose;  
And every want to opulence allied,  
And every pang that folly pays to pride.  
These gentle hours that plenty bade to bloom,  
Those calm desires that asked but little room,  
70 Those healthful sports that graced the peaceful scene,



Lived in each look, and brightened all the green;  
These far departing seek a kinder shore,  
And rural mirth and manners are no more.

75 Sweet Auburn! parent of the blissful hour,  
Thy glades forlorn confess the tyrant's power.  
Here, as I take my solitary rounds,  
Amidst thy tangling walks, and ruined grounds,  
And, many a year elapsed, return to view  
80 Where once the cottage stood, the hawthorn grew,  
Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,  
Swells at my breast, and turns the past to pain.

In all my wanderings round this world of care,  
In all my griefs—and God has given my share—  
85 I still had hopes my latest hours to crown,  
Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down;  
To husband out life's taper at the close,  
And keep the flame from wasting by repose.  
I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,  
Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill,  
90 Around my fire an evening group to draw,  
And tell of all I felt, and all I saw;  
And, as an hare whom hounds and horns pursue,  
Pants to the place from whence at first she flew,  
I still had hopes, my long vexations past,  
95 Here to return—and die at home at last.

O blest retirement, friend to life's decline,  
Retreats from care that never must be mine,  
How happy he who crowns in shades like these,  
A youth of labor with an age of ease;  
100 Who quits a world where strong temptations try,  
And, since 'tis hard to combat, learns to fly!  
For him no wretches, born to work and weep,  
Explore the mine, or tempt the dangerous deep;  
No surly porter stands in guilty state  
105 To spurn imploring famine from the gate;  
But on he moves to meet his latter end,

Angels around befriending virtue's friend;  
Bends to the grave with unperceived decay,  
While Resignation gently slopes the way;  
110 And, all his prospects brightening to the last,  
His Heaven commences ere the world be passed!  
Sweet was the sound when oft at evening's close,  
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose;  
There, as I passed with careless steps and slow,  
115 The mingling notes came softened from below;  
The swain responsive as the milkmaid sung,  
The sober herd that lowed to meet their young,  
The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,  
The playful children just let loose from school;  
120 The watchdog's voice that bayed the whispering wind,  
And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant<sup>o</sup> mind;  
These all in sweet confusion sought the shade,  
And filled each pause the nightingale had made.  
But now the sounds of population fail,  
125 No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale,  
No busy steps the grass-grown footway tread,  
For all the bloomy flush of life is fled.  
All but yon widowed, solitary thing  
That feebly bends beside the plashy<sup>o</sup> spring;  
130 She, wretched matron, forced, in age, for bread,  
To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread,  
To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,  
To seek her nightly shed, and weep till morn;  
She only left of all the harmless train,  
135 The sad historian of the pensive<sup>o</sup> plain.  
Near yonder copse, where once the garden  
smiled,  
And still where many a garden flower grows wild,  
There, where a few torn shrubs the place disclose,  
The village preacher's modest mansion rose.  
140 A man he was, to all the country dear,  
And passing rich with forty pounds a year;

Remote from towns he ran his godly race,  
Nor e'er had changed, nor wished to change his  
place;  
145 Unpracticed he to fawn, or seek for power,  
By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour;  
Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,  
More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise.  
His house was known to all the vagrant train,  
He chid their wanderings, but relieved their pain;  
150 The long-remembered beggar was his guest,  
Whose beard descending swept his aged breast;  
The ruined spendthrift, now no longer proud,  
Claimed kindred there, and had his claims allowed;  
The broken soldier, kindly bade to stay,  
155 Sate by his fire, and talked the night away;  
Wept o'er his wounds, or tales of sorrow done,  
Shouldered his crutch, and showed how fields were  
won.  
Pleased with his guests, the good man learned to  
glow,  
And quite forgot their vices in their woe;  
160 Careless their merits, or their faults to scan,  
His pity gave ere charity began.  
Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride,  
And even his failings leaned to Virtue's side;  
But in his duty prompt at every call,  
165 He watched and wept, he prayed and felt, for all.  
And, as a bird each fond endearment tries,  
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,  
He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,  
Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.  
170 Beside the bed where parting life was laid,  
And sorrow, guilt, and pain, by turns dismayed,  
The reverend champion stood. At his control,  
Despair and anguish fled the struggling soul;  
Comfort came down the trembling wretch to raise,

And his last faltering accents whispered praise.  
175       At church, with meek and unaffected grace,  
His looks adorned the venerable place;  
Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,  
And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray.  
180       The service past, around the pious man,  
With steady zeal each honest rustic ran;  
Even children followed with endearing wile,  
And plucked his gown, to share the good man's smile.  
His ready smile a parent's warmth expressed,  
185       Their welfare pleased him, and their cares distressed;  
To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,  
But all his serious thoughts had rest in Heaven.  
As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,  
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,  
190       Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,  
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.  
      Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way,  
With blossomed furze unprofitably gay,  
There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,  
195       The village master taught his little school;  
A man severe he was, and stern to view,  
I knew him well, and every truant knew;  
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace  
The day's disasters in his morning face;  
200       Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee,  
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;  
Full well the busy whisper circling round,  
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned;  
Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught,  
205       The love he bore to learning was in fault;<sup>2</sup>  
The village all declared how much he knew;  
'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too;  
Lands he could measure, terms and tides<sup>3</sup> presage,  
And even the story ran that he could gauge.<sup>4</sup>  
210       In arguing too, the parson owned his skill,

For even though vanquished, he could argue still;  
While words of learned length, and thundering sound,  
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around;  
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,  
215 That one small head could carry all he knew.

But past is all his fame. The very spot  
Where many a time he triumphed, is forgot.  
Near yonder thorn, that lifts its head on high,  
Where once the signpost caught the passing eye,  
220 Low lies that house where nut-brown draughts  
inspired,

Where graybeard Mirth and smiling Toil retired,  
Where village statesmen talked with looks profound,  
And news much older than their ale went round.

Imagination fondly stoops to trace  
225 The parlor splendors of that festive place:  
The whitewashed wall, the nicely sanded floor,  
The varnished clock that clicked behind the door;  
The chest contrived a double debt to pay,  
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day;  
230 The pictures placed for ornament and use,  
The twelve good rules, the royal game of goose;<sup>5</sup>  
The hearth, except when winter chilled the day,  
With aspen boughs, and flowers, and fennel gay,  
While broken teacups, wisely kept for show,  
235 Ranged o'er the chimney, glistened in a row.

Vain transitory splendors! Could not all  
Reprieve the tottering mansion from its fall!  
Obscure it sinks, nor shall it more impart  
An hour's importance to the poor man's heart;  
240 Thither no more the peasant shall repair  
To sweet oblivion of his daily care;  
No more the farmer's news, the barber's tale,  
No more the woodman's ballad shall prevail;  
No more the smith his dusky brow shall clear,  
245 Relax his ponderous strength, and lean to hear;

The host himself no longer shall be found  
Careful to see the mantling bliss<sup>6</sup> go round;  
Nor the coy maid, half willing to be pressed,  
Shall kiss the cup to pass it to the rest.

250       Yes! let the rich deride, the proud disdain,  
These simple blessings of the lowly train,  
To me more dear, congenial to my heart,  
One native charm, than all the gloss of art;  
255       Spontaneous joys, where nature has its play,  
The soul adopts, and owns their first-born sway;  
Lightly they frolic o'er the vacant mind,  
Unenvied, unmolested, unconfined.

But the long pomp, the midnight masquerade,  
With all the freaks of wanton wealth arrayed,  
260       In these, ere triflers half their wish obtain,  
The toiling pleasure sickens into pain;  
And, even while fashion's brightest arts decoy,  
The heart distrusting asks, if this be joy.

265       Ye friends to truth, ye statesmen, who survey  
The rich man's joys increase, the poor's decay,  
'Tis yours to judge how wide the limits stand  
Between a splendid and an happy land.

Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted ore,  
And shouting Folly hails them from her shore;  
270       Hoards, even beyond the miser's wish abound,  
And rich men flock from all the world around.

Yet count our gains. This wealth is but a name  
That leaves our useful products still the same.

275       Not so the loss. The man of wealth and pride  
Takes up a space that many poor supplied;  
Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,  
Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds;  
The robe that wraps his limbs in silken sloth  
Has robbed the neighboring fields of half their  
280       growth;

His seat, where solitary sports are seen,

Indignant spurns the cottage from the green;  
Around the world each needful product flies,  
For all the luxuries the world supplies.  
While thus the land adorned for pleasure all  
285 In barren splendor feebly waits the fall.  
    As some fair female unadorned and plain,  
Secure to please while youth confirms her reign,  
Slights every borrowed charm that dress supplies,  
Nor shares with art the triumph of her eyes:  
290 But when those charms are past, for charms are frail,  
When time advances, and when lovers fail,  
She then shines forth, solicitous to bless,  
In all the glaring impotence of dress:  
Thus fares the land, by luxury betrayed;  
295 In nature's simplest charms at first arrayed;  
But verging to decline, its splendors rise,  
Its vistas strike, its palaces surprise;  
While scourged by famine from the smiling land,  
The mournful peasant leads his humble band;  
300 And while he sinks without one arm to save,  
The country blooms—a garden, and a grave.  
    Where then, ah where, shall Poverty reside,  
To 'scape the pressure of contiguous Pride?  
If to some common's fenceless limits strayed,  
305 He drives his flock to pick the scanty blade,  
Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide,  
And even the bare-worn common is denied.  
    If to the city sped—What waits him there?  
To see profusion that he must not share;  
310 To see ten thousand baneful arts combined  
To pamper luxury, and thin mankind;  
To see those joys the sons of pleasure know,  
Extorted from his fellow creature's woe.  
Here, while the courtier glitters in brocade,  
315 There the pale artist<sup>o</sup> plies the sickly trade;  
Here, while the proud their long-drawn pomps display,

There the black gibbet glooms beside the way.  
The dome where Pleasure holds her midnight reign,  
Here, richly decked, admits the gorgeous train;  
320 Tumultuous grandeur crowds the blazing square,  
The rattling chariots clash, the torches glare.  
Sure scenes like these no troubles e'er annoy!  
Sure these denote one universal joy!  
Are these thy serious thoughts?—Ah, turn thine eyes  
325 Where the poor houseless shivering female lies.  
She once, perhaps, in village plenty blest,  
Has wept at tales of innocence distressed;  
Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,  
Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn;  
330 Now lost to all; her friends, her virtue fled,  
Near her betrayer's door she lays her head,  
And pinched with cold, and shrinking from the  
shower,  
With heavy heart deplores that luckless hour,  
When idly first, ambitious of the town,  
335 She left her wheel<sup>o</sup> and robes of country brown.  
Do thine, sweet Auburn, thine, the loveliest train,  
Do thy fair tribes participate her pain?  
Even now, perhaps, by cold and hunger led,  
At proud men's doors they ask a little bread!  
340 Ah, no. To distant climes, a dreary scene,  
Where half the convex world intrudes between,  
Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they go,  
Where wild Altama<sup>z</sup> murmurs to their woe.  
Far different there from all that charmed before,  
345 The various terrors of that horrid shore;  
Those blazing suns that dart a downward ray,  
And fiercely shed intolerable day;  
Those matted woods where birds forget to sing,  
But silent bats in drowsy clusters cling;  
350 Those poisonous fields with rank luxuriance crowned,  
Where the dark scorpion gathers death around;



Where at each step the stranger fears to wake  
The rattling terrors of the vengeful snake;  
Where crouching tigers<sup>8</sup> wait their hapless prey,  
355 And savage men, more murderous still than they;  
While oft in whirls the mad tornado flies,  
Mingling the ravaged landscape with the skies.  
Far different these from every former scene,  
The cooling brook, the grassy-vested green,  
360 The breezy covert of the warbling grove,  
That only sheltered thefts of harmless love.  
    Good Heaven! what sorrows gloomed that parting  
    day,  
That called them from their native walks away;  
When the poor exiles, every pleasure past,  
365 Hung round their bowers, and fondly looked their last,  
And took a long farewell, and wished in vain  
For seats like these beyond the western main;  
And shuddering still to face the distant deep,  
Returned and wept, and still returned to weep.  
370 The good old sire, the first prepared to go  
To new-found worlds, and wept for other's woe.  
But for himself, in conscious virtue brave,  
He only wished for worlds beyond the grave.  
His lovely daughter, lovelier in her tears,  
375 The fond companion of his helpless years,  
Silent went next, neglectful of her charms,  
And left a lover's for a father's arms.  
With louder plaints the mother spoke her woes,  
And blessed the cot where every pleasure rose;  
380 And kissed her thoughtless babes with many a tear,  
And clasped them close in sorrow doubly dear;  
Whilst her fond husband strove to lend relief  
In all the silent manliness of grief.  
    O luxury! Thou cursed by Heaven's decree,  
385 How ill exchanged are things like these for thee!  
How do thy portions, with insidious joy,

Diffuse their pleasures only to destroy!  
Kingdoms, by thee, to sickly greatness grown,  
Boast of a florid vigor not their own.  
390 At every draught more large and large they grow,  
A bloated mass of rank unwieldy woe;  
Till sapped their strength, and every part unsound,  
Down, down they sink, and spread a ruin round.  
Even now the devastation is begun,  
395 And half the business of destruction done;  
Even now, methinks, as pondering here I stand,  
I see the rural Virtues leave the land.  
Down where yon anchoring vessel spreads the sail,  
That idly waiting flaps with every gale,  
400 Downward they move, a melancholy band,  
Pass from the shore, and darken all the strand.  
Contented Toil, and hospitable Care,  
And kind connubial Tenderness are there;  
And Piety, with wishes placed above,  
405 And steady Loyalty, and faithful Love:  
And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,  
Still [o](#) first to fly where sensual joys invade;  
Unfit in these degenerate times of shame,  
To catch the heart, or strike for honest fame;  
410 Dear charming Nymph, neglected and decried,  
My shame in crowds, my solitary pride;  
Thou source of all my bliss, and all my woe,  
That found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so;  
Thou guide by which the nobler arts excel,  
415 Thou nurse of every virtue, fare thee well.  
Farewell, and O! where'er thy voice be tried  
On Torno's cliffs, or Pambamarca's side,<sup>9</sup>  
Whether where equinoctial fervors glow,  
Or winter wraps the polar world in snow,  
420 Still let thy voice, prevailing over time,  
Redress the rigors of the inclement clime;  
Aid slighted truth, with thy persuasive strain

Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain;  
Teach him that states of native strength possessed,  
425 Though very poor, may still be very blest;  
That Trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,  
As ocean sweeps the labored mole<sup>1</sup> away;  
While self-dependent power can time defy,  
430 As rocks resist the billows and the sky.<sup>2</sup>

## Endnotes

1770

- Note 1:  
*The Deserted Village* is an idealization of English rural life mingled with poignant memories of the poet's own youth in Lissoy, Ireland. Goldsmith was seriously concerned about the effects of the agricultural revolution then in progress, which was being hastened by Enclosure Acts. Either for the sake of more profitable farming or to create vast private parks and landscape gardens, arable land was being "enclosed"—that is, taken out the hands of small proprietors—thus displacing yeoman farmers who, like their ancestors, had lived for generations in small villages, grazing their cattle on common land and raising food on small holdings. The only alternative available to many such people was to seek employment in the city or to migrate to America. In the poem, Goldsmith opposes "luxury" (the increase of wealth, the growth of cities, and the costly country estates of great noblemen and wealthy merchants) to "rural virtue" (the old agrarian economy that supported a sturdy population of independent peasants). His poem is thus at once a nostalgic lament for a doomed way of life and a denunciation of what he regarded as the corrupting, destructive force of new wealth.  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Because the / was silent, *fault* and *aught* rhymed perfectly.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Feasts and seasons in the church year. "Terms": dates on which rent, wages, etc. were due and tenancy began or

- ended.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Measure the content of casks and other vessels.[Return to reference 4](#)
  - Note 5: A game in which counters were moved on a board, according to the throw of the dice. “The twelve good rules” of conduct, attributed to Charles I, were printed in a broadside that was often seen on the walls of taverns.[Return to reference 5](#)
  - Note 6: Foaming bliss—that is, foaming ale.[Return to reference 6](#)
  - Note 7: The Altamaha River in Georgia.[Return to reference 7](#)
  - Note 8: Not the Asian tiger but the puma.[Return to reference 8](#)
  - Note 9: The river Torne in Sweden falls into the Gulf of Bothnia. Pambamarca is a mountain in Ecuador.[Return to reference 9](#)
  - Note 1: The laboriously built breakwater.[Return to reference 1](#)
  - Note 2: Samuel Johnson, a friend of Goldsmith’s, composed the last four lines of the poem.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *cottage*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Sunday*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *quarter acre*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *oppressive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *idle, carefree*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *boggy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gloomy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *artisan*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *spinning wheel*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *always*[Return to reference °](#)

# **JAMES MACPHERSON (Ossian)**

## **1736–1796**

Ossian was a Gaelic bard from the third century—or was he?

In 1760, the young Scottish tutor James Macpherson published *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland and Translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language*. The book declared these fragments to be “genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry” and associated them with the legendary hero and bard Ossian. The literati of the Scottish Enlightenment loved the idea of an ancient Scottish epic poem to rival Homer’s *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, and Macpherson was encouraged to go to the Highlands to collect more verse to translate—a task that involved searching for extant texts but also listening to old men’s stories and ballads. The results of this work were two epic poems, *Fingal* (1762) and *Temora* (1763), later published together as *The Works of Ossian, Son of Fingal. Translated by James Macpherson* (1765).

The Ossianic poems were a sensational success. Their reception was informed by lively interest in the period in relationships between Scotland and England but also between the oral and the written, the past and the present. As the influential Scottish literary critic (and Ossian fan) Hugh Blair (1718–1800) put it, the poems feature “the fire and enthusiasm” characteristic of ancient times but also a “tenderness” that resonated with eighteenth-century audiences—this poetry truly “deserves to be styled,” Blair asserted, “*The Poetry of the Heart*.” It seemed to many to capture something primal, heroic,

and sublime about the Scottish Highlands—a place whose culture and way of life had seemed threatened since the British victory over Highland clans at the Battle of Culloden in 1746.

Questions about the poems' authenticity, however, soon arose. Had Macpherson really translated these from collected materials, or were the poems the figments of Macpherson's imagination? Dr. Samuel Johnson famously called the poetry "a cheat" and "an imposture" (see [p. 892](#)), and Macpherson could not produce any manuscripts that the Ossian poems exactly translated. The truth was that the Ossianic poems were neither "genuine" literal translations nor complete fakes. Ossian figures in Gaelic oral tradition and early written texts in both Scotland and Ireland, and Macpherson did eagerly collect and work from very old Gaelic ballads, both written and oral. But he also fundamentally reimagined these poems and stories to suit the tastes of his eighteenth-century readers—his poems were more like adaptations than translations.

As the controversy raged on, attempts to figure out precisely what Macpherson had done with his sources stimulated a new fascination about the art that did survive from the Scottish past (and the Irish and Welsh pasts—the figure of the bard catalyzed nationalist feeling across the British Isles). And the Ossian poems continued to be printed and read widely—in Britain but also in France, Italy, and Germany. Early Romantic writers would be inspired by the wild sublimity and tragic melancholy of Ossian's world. The poems also involved a kind of formal experimentation that seemed intriguing: the "translations" lacked rhyme, line, and meter but still seemed undeniably *poetic*. Both of the fragments featured here are about doomed warriors, and both feature the voice of an ancient bard. Contemporaries' fascination with such bardic mouthpieces for a heroic, lost past had everything to do with their sense of their own modernity.

***From* Fragments of Ancient Poetry,  
Collected in the Highlands of Scotland**

## **Fragment 7<sup>1</sup>**

Why openest thou afresh the spring of my grief, O son of Alpin, inquiring how Oscan fell? My eyes are blind with tears; but memory beams on my heart. How can I relate the mournful death of the head of the people! Prince of the warriors, Oscan, my son, shall I see thee no more!

He fell as the moon in a storm; as the sun from the midst of his course, when clouds rise from the waste of the waves, when the blackness of the storm enwraps the rocks of Ardannider. I, like an ancient oak on Morven,<sup>2</sup> I molder alone in my place. The blast<sup>3</sup> hath lopped my branches away; and I tremble at the wings of the north. Prince of the warriors, Oscan, my son! shall I see thee no more!

Dermid and Oscan were one: They reaped the battle together. Their friendship was strong as their steel; and death walked between them to the field. They came on the foe like two rocks falling from the brows of Ardven. Their swords were stained with the blood of the valiant: warriors fainted at their names. Who was a match for Oscan, but Dermid? and who for Dermid, but Oscan!

They killed mighty Dargo in the field; Dargo before invincible. His daughter was fair as the morn; mild as the beam of night. Her eyes, like two stars in a shower: her breath, the gale of spring: her breasts, as the new-fallen snow floating on the moving heath. The warriors saw her, and loved; their souls were fixed on the maid. Each loved her, as his fame; each must possess her or die. But her soul was fixed on Oscan; my son was the youth of her love. She forgot the blood of her father; and loved the hand that slew<sup>4</sup> him.

Son of Oscan, said Dermid, I love; O Oscan, I love this maid. But her soul cleaveth unto<sup>5</sup> thee; and nothing can heal Dermid. Here, pierce this bosom, Oscan; relieve me, my friend, with thy sword.

My sword, son of Mornny, shall never be stained with the blood of Dermid.

Who then is worthy to slay me, O Oscan son of Oscan? Let not my life pass away unknown. Let none but Oscan slay me. Send me



with honor to the grave, and let my death be renowned.

Dermid, make use of thy sword; son of Morny, wield thy steel.  
Would that I fell with thee! that my death came from the hand of Dermid!

They fought by the brook of the mountain; by the streams of Branno. Blood tinged the silvery stream, and crudled<sup>6</sup> round the mossy stones. Dermid the graceful fell; fell, and smiled in death.

And fallest thou, son of Morny; fallest, thou by Oscan's hand!  
Dermid invincible in war, thus do I see thee fall!—He<sup>7</sup> went, and returned to the maid whom he loved; returned, but she perceived his grief.

Why that gloom, son of Oscan? What shades thy mighty soul?

Though once renowned for the bow, O maid, I have lost my fame. Fixed on a tree by the brook of the hill, is the shield of Gormur the brave, whom in battle I slew. I have wasted the day in vain, nor could my arrow pierce it.

Let me try, son of Oscan, the skill of Dargo's daughter. My hands were taught the bow: my father delighted in my skill.

She went. He stood behind the shield. Her arrow flew and pierced his breast.<sup>8</sup>

Blessed be that hand of snow; and blessed thy bow of yew! I fall resolved on death: and who but the daughter of Dargo was worthy to slay me? Lay me in the earth, my fair one; lay me by the side of Dermid.

Oscan! I have the blood, the soul of the mighty Dargo. Well pleased I can meet death. My sorrow I can end thus.—She pierced her white bosom with steel. She fell; she trembled; and died.

By the brook of the hill their graves are laid; a birch's unequal shade covers their tomb. Often on their green earthen tombs the branchy<sup>9</sup> sons of the mountain feed, when midday is all in flames, and silence is over all the hills.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: In this fragment, Ossian laments the deaths of his son Oſcur, Oſcur’s friend Dermid (ſon of Morny), and Oſcur’s love (the daughter of Dargo). Oſſian addreſſes himſelf to the ſon of Alpin, another bard. This was the firſt of Macpherson’s “translations.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In a note to *Fingal*, Macpherson explained, “All the Northwest coaſt of Scotland probably went of old under the name of Morven, which ſignifies a ridge of very high hills.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Of the ſtorm.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Slayed.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Joins with.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: “To coagulate; to congeal” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Oſcur.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Nothing was held by the ancient Highlanders more eſſential to their glory, than to die by the hand of ſome perſon worthy or renowned. This was the occaſion of Oſcur’s contriving to be ſlain by his miſtreſs, now that he was weary of life. In thoſe early times, ſuicide was utterly unknown among that people, and no traces of it are found in the old poetry. Whence the tranſlator ſuſpects the account that follows of the daughter of Dargo killing herſelf, to be the interpolation of ſome later bard [*Macpherson’s note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Antlered.[Return to reference 9](#)

## ***Fragment 12<sup>1</sup>***

Ryno:

The wind and the rain are over: calm is the noon of day. The clouds are divided in heaven. Over the green hills flies the inconstant sun. Red through the stony vale comes down the stream of the hill. Sweet are thy murmurs, O stream! But more sweet is the voice I hear. It is the voice of Alpin, the son of the song, mourning for the dead. Bent is his head of age, and red his tearful eye. Alpin, thou son of the song, why alone on the silent hill? Why complainest thou, as a blast in the wood; as a wave on the lonely shore?

Alpin:

My tears, O Ryno! are for the dead; my voice, for the inhabitants of the grave. Tall thou art on the hill; fair among the sons of the plain. But thou shalt fall like Morar;<sup>2</sup> and the mourner shalt sit on thy tomb. The hills shall know thee no more; thy bow shall lie in the hall, unstrung.

Thou wert swift, O Morar! as a roe on the hill; terrible as a meteor of fire. Thy wrath was as the storm of December. Thy sword in battle, as lightning in the field. Thy voice was like a stream after rain; like thunder on distant hills. Many fell by thy arm; they were consumed in the flames of thy wrath.

But when thou returnedst from war, how peaceful was thy brow! Thy face was like the sun after rain; like the moon in the silence of night; calm as the breast of the lake when the loud wind is laid.

Narrow is thy dwelling now; dark the place of thine abode. With three steps I compass thy grave, O thou who wast so great before! Four stones with their heads of moss are the only memorial of thee. A tree with scarce a leaf, long grass which whistles in the wind, mark to the hunter's eye the grave of the mighty Morar. Morar! Thou art low indeed. Thou hast no mother to mourn thee; no maid with her tears of love. Dead is she that brought thee forth. Fallen is the daughter of Morglan.<sup>3</sup>

Who on his staff is this? Who is this, whose head is white with age, whose eyes are red with tears, who quakes at every step?—It is thy father, O Morar! The father of none but thee. He heard of thy fame in battle; he heard of foes dispersed. He heard of Morar's fame; why did he not hear of his wound? Weep, thou father of Morar! Weep; but thy son heareth thee not. Deep is the sleep of the dead; low their pillow of dust. No more shall he hear thy voice; no more shall he awake at thy call. When shall it be morn in the grave, to bid the slumberer awake?

Farewell, thou bravest of men! Thou conqueror in the field! But the field shall see thee no more; nor the dark wood be lightened with the splendor of thy steel. Thou hast left no son. But the song shall preserve thy name. Future times shall hear of thee; they shall hear of the fallen Morar.

## Endnotes

1760

- Note 1: Both Ryno and Alpin were bards. Macpherson later incorporated this fragment into a longer poem, *The Songs of Selma*, published with *Fingal* (1762).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A fallen hero, here lamented. In *Songs of Selma*, Macpherson glosses the etymology: "Mór-ér, *great man*."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Morar's beloved was the "daughter of Morglan," no other name given.[Return to reference 3](#)

# Britain and Transatlantic Slavery

British pirates and traders had engaged, mostly sporadically, in the European trade in enslaved Africans from the mid-sixteenth century onward, but 1660, the year the monarchy was restored to England, was a major turning point. That year saw the founding of the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa, which was reorganized into the Royal African Company in 1672. It was in this period that enslavement became a mass enterprise in the British economy: the notorious Triangle Trade was established. Ships from London, Liverpool, and Bristol in England, and eventually Glasgow in Scotland, brought manufactured goods such as liquor, textiles, weapons, and gunpowder to the western coast of sub-Saharan Africa, along the Bight of Benin in the Gulf of Guinea. They traded these goods with African elites for enslaved Africans, often those captured in wars between African nations and ethnic groups, fomented by the Europeans themselves to promote the trade. Then began the terrible journey across the Atlantic, known as the Middle Passage: European enslavers forced multitudes of Africans into foully unclean, grotesquely overcrowded ships; approximately 15 percent of them did not survive the journey to the ships' destinations in the Caribbean and mainland North America. Jamaica, which the British seized from the Spanish in 1655, came to be the British Empire's most lucrative and brutal sugar colony: more enslaved people were taken to that relatively small island than to all of mainland North America. British sugar islands in the Caribbean also included Barbados, St. Kitts, Montserrat, Antigua, Grenada—the list goes on. Those who disembarked faced what contemporaries called "seasoning," the adjustment to living and working conditions on plantations—a period of high mortality rates due to disease, malnutrition, mistreatment, the severity of the labor, and suicide.

After this initial period, conditions for enslaved people remained relentlessly harsh, and enslaved women faced the terrible additional threat of sexual violence. Meanwhile the ships that brought Africans to the western colonies would return to Britain with the raw or partly processed products of enslaved labor—especially sugar, but also tobacco, cocoa, coffee, ginger, and cotton—and the cycle would begin again.

The Royal African Company was a royal monopoly: its first governor was the brother of King Charles II, James, Duke of York, who would become King James II in 1685. The Company also supplied the government with precious metals, coining a famous denomination of British currency, the guinea, named for the gold that composed it, sourced from West Africa: originally worth 20 to 25 shillings, it bore symbols associated with the RAC's enslaving activities, including, in different mintages, the elephant, the elephant and castle, and the face of James II. The British engagement with the trade in enslaved Africans would increase to newly high levels during the reign of the next king, William III, with the Trade with Africa Act of 1698. Ending the Company's monopoly, the act allowed all British merchants to engage in the trade if they paid a 10 percent duty to maintain the RAC's infrastructure of enslavement—settlements on the coast of Africa variously called forts, factories, and castles. Subsequently, as part of the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 that ended the War of the Spanish Succession, Britain would gain another component of the trade: the monopoly, called the *asiento de negros*, to supply the Spanish Empire with enslaved Africans for thirty years, in ships principally bound for Cuba, and for Central and South America. The South Sea Company, which held the *asiento*, collapsed spectacularly in 1720 but continued to trade in enslaved people for years afterward, though the *asiento* was frequently interrupted when Britain went to war with Spain. The Royal African Company itself, which regained its monopoly over the British part of the trade in 1714 only to lose it permanently in 1726, finally disappeared in 1750, but was replaced by another British trading consortium, the African Company of Merchants, in 1752. Numerous British business arrangements succeeded, failed, and reorganized,

and companies boomed and went bust during the long engagement of Britain in the transatlantic trade. Through it all, the numbers of Africans taken by British enslavers relentlessly accumulated.

According to the website [slavevoyages.org](http://slavevoyages.org), the six peak decades of Britain's total trafficking occurred after 1750, right up to the year of its abolition, 1807, with numbers of people abducted from Africa ranging from 255,346 in 1751–60 to a high of 385,928 in 1791–1800. All told, British enslavers took an estimated 3,259,439 people; of these, 2,733,323 disembarked, enslaved, in the Western Hemisphere.





William Blake, ***Europe Supported by Africa & America***, 1796. Blake follows the allegorical tradition of representing the continents as beautiful women. The armbands on Africa and America signify their enslavement, but their strength supports



Europe, and unlike hers, their eyes meet the viewer's. From John Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam . . . from the Year 1772, to 1777* (1796).

---

Despite its steady growth over some 150 years, the British system of enslavement met considerable and consistent resistance, especially from the Black people taken in the trade. Uprisings aboard enslavers' ships were common and widely feared by British traders (see William Snelgrave's account of these fears below). And on the colonial plantations themselves, a sequence of rebellions throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (and beyond) seriously challenged Britain's colonial power in the Caribbean. British colonists and writers often linked such rebellions with a particular group of Africans, associated with the Akan ethnic group, whom they called "Coromantee," named after a British fort near the African town of Kormantse in what is now Ghana. Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, with a hero said to be from "Coramantien," offers a fictionalized account of one such rebellion in mid-seventeenth-century South America (see [p. 152](#)). Among the most extensive of actual "Coromantee" revolts was Tacky's Rebellion, or Tacky's War, named after its leader (also called Takyi), which began in 1760 on Jamaica and lasted months, with repercussions carrying on for years, providing inspiration to enslaved people throughout the Caribbean and beyond. Other, more quiet forms of resistance by enslaved people, including work slowdowns and acts of sabotage, significantly reduced the profitability of the enslavers' system.



**Portrait of Dido Belle and Lady Elizabeth Murray, ca. 1778,** by David Martin. Dido Belle, left, was born enslaved in the West Indies around 1761 to an enslaved woman, Maria Belle. Dido's father, Sir John Lindsay, brought her and her mother to England around 1765, where Dido was baptized. She was taken into the household of Lindsay's uncle, William Murray, Earl of Mansfield, and raised as a free English gentlewoman, with another niece of Lord Mansfield's, Lady Elizabeth Murray (right). Lord Mansfield's famous ruling in the *Somerset* case in 1772 (see below) seemed to many to declare slavery illegal in England—a decision, some suggested, that was influenced by his family relationship to Dido Belle.

---

Principled calls in public discourse for abolition resisted slavery at another level. Such challenges were at first isolated and unorganized,

but they grew in urgency and scale, in mainland North America and Britain. In the late seventeenth century, members of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, began to preach against enslavement, denouncing it as un-Christian; this developing tradition resulted in the important antislavery texts and abolitionist activism of Philadelphia Quaker Anthony Benezet (see below). Other White abolitionists raised their voices through the middle decades of the century: in Britain, the most famous among them was Granville Sharp (1735–1813). Black activists, including Olaudah Equiano (see [p. 1081](#)) and Ottobah Cugoana (see below), helped lead the British abolitionist movement, which began to gain ground after the *Somerset* decision in 1772, a court case supported by Sharp that seemed to declare that slavery on English soil had no basis in law (see below). Abolitionism finally began to achieve more widespread popular support by the 1780s: it became a celebrated cause among both the fervent and the fashionable in Britain. British parliamentary leaders of the movement to end the transatlantic trade, including William Wilberforce, put the first abolition bill to a vote in 1789, which was defeated by proslavery interests. In North America, the stirrings of abolition began somewhat earlier; Black leaders such as Prince Hall of Boston helped link emancipation of the enslaved to the ideals of the new nation declared in 1776 (see below). By the time the United States Constitution was ratified in 1789, several Northern states had outlawed enslavement, either outright or on schemes of gradual emancipation, and more would soon do so. But the new Constitution created a national structure in which “free” states were bound not only to accommodate but also to help maintain slavery in areas where it continued. Britain banned the transatlantic trade in 1807; the United States would also do so in 1808 (though the trade internal to the United States would go on). In 1833, slavery itself would be finally abolished in nearly all of Britain’s overseas colonies. The campaign against slavery was a long, grinding, passionate one, full of high ideals—though a long (sometimes contested) tradition of historiography has argued that it finally succeeded only when enslavement’s profitability had begun to fail.

Various genres of literature in the eighteenth century addressed enslavement and the traffic in enslaved Africans by blending fact and fiction, idealism and realism, acceptance and critique. Literary historians have been struck by the very large proportion of poems in English about slavery that took a stand against it, from the late seventeenth century onward, and especially after the middle of the eighteenth. But exceptions, such as James Boswell's unambiguously titled "No Abolition of Slavery" (see below), exist; poems such as *The Sugar-Cane* by James Grainger (see below) seem both to deplore and to materially support enslavers' practices; and even ardently antislavery poems employ racializing and other culturally biased rhetoric that demands critical scrutiny. Fiction and drama also treated slavery in complex ways, in passing or at length, but the literary genre that offers perhaps the fullest depiction of it is memoir. Ottobah Cugoano and especially Olaudah Equiano present firsthand views of what being enslaved was like; from the opposite perspective, William Snelgrave offers insight into what he, as an enslaver, thought he was doing. The genres presented here that are not usually considered "literary" today—the petition, the polemic, the philosophical treatise—use carefully crafted, inventive rhetoric to work through arguments about slavery's meanings and costs.

The cluster below offers only a small fraction of writing about slavery published in English in the eighteenth century. A considerable number of pamphlets and essays attempted to justify it, or at least downplay its horrors and extol its economic benefits. The system of enslavement enriched estates across Britain and wielded enormous power in the nation's affairs—in government, business, and the media—and this cannot be understood without a critical encounter with the ideological apparatus that upheld it, represented here by selections from Snelgrave, Grainger, Boswell, and, most graphically, a page from the *Jamaica Mercury*, a newspaper, with advertisements showing how thoroughly slavery was woven into the total economy. The cluster also provides an opportunity to listen to a range of Black voices, from Cugoano to Jupiter Hammon, on the issue of slavery. Black people taken by force into British dominions were using the English language in the period in vast numbers, but writing and

publishing remained almost completely closed to them. Some colonial regimes made English literacy for Black people a crime, and publishers in Britain and elsewhere had little inclination to bring their writing into print. Several Black authors nonetheless arose in these utterly unfavorable circumstances to protest injustices faced by their people, analyze the dynamics of enslavement and other forms of racist oppression, and contribute profoundly to abolitionist causes. They offered much more as well: the literary works of Francis Williams (ca. 1700–1770), Phillis Wheatley (see [p. 985](#)), Ignatius Sancho (see [p. 1019](#)), and others range generously across their authors' intellectual, religious, and aesthetic interests.

The language of enslavement, race, and ethnicity in the eighteenth century differs significantly from current usage. In the following cluster, both White and Black writers commonly use the word "slaves" to refer to those taken in the trade; scholars now refer to "enslaved people" to avoid defining the identity or existence of human beings with a status imposed by force on them by someone else. For similar reasons, scholars now avoid saying that one person was "owned by" or was the "property of" another (and by extension that a person was "sold to" or "bought by" someone else), or that a person was another's "master" or "owner." The word *negro*, sometimes capitalized, was commonly used in the period by Black and White writers as a "correct," respectful, or at least neutral term to refer to people with sub-Saharan African heritage; the word has fallen out of use now because it is seen as antiquated, and some now consider it a slur. Interestingly, among the Black writers included in this volume, only the most militant of them, Ottobah Cugoana, seems to avoid the term, and usually uses "Black" or "African" in his book instead, though it is not easy to conclude exactly what that means. (Of course, like any other polite or correct word, the term *negro* may be employed in the period in dismissive or disparaging ways, and all its occurrences are open to interpretation.) Throughout this volume, the headnotes, footnotes, and other editorial apparatus adhere to current standards of usage, which aim to ensure that our language does not endorse the dehumanizing premises that allowed

this trade to flourish. The language of authors of the Restoration period and the eighteenth century included here is always their own.



# JOHN LOCKE

The *Two Treatises of Government* (1689–90) by John Locke (1632–1704) have served as a blueprint for what has been called modern liberalism: the doctrine that all people are naturally free and must obey only those laws that they themselves or their elected representatives have contrived and ratified. Locke's *Treatises* promote a view of government radically at odds with, and designed to rebut, the theory of absolute monarchy propounded by Sir Robert Filmer (1588–1653), whose *Patriarcha* (1680, probably completed by the late 1630s) claimed that subjects owe unquestioning submission to kings, who ultimately derive their authority from God. It is unclear how powerfully Locke's *Treatises* influenced political radicalism in the decades immediately after his death—his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689–90; see [p. 117](#)) exerted a far more overt, palpable influence on philosophy—but by the time of the founding of the United States in 1776, Locke had become an important theorist of liberty for those promoting representative government.

The centrality of the concept of slavery for such discussions is illustrated by the excerpts from the *Two Treatises* below. Locke's definition of slavery—to be subject to “the unconstant, uncertain, unknown arbitrary will of another man”—is deliberately broad. It refers to various systems of slavery throughout history, in Europe, Africa, and Asia, as well as the chattel slavery introduced by Europeans in their colonies in the Western Hemisphere. But for Locke, slavery also applies to a nation's political subjugation to a tyrant, and could describe what the French endured under Louis XIV, or what the English would face under an absolute Stuart monarch. When Britons declare in coming decades that they refuse to be “slaves,” they often have this political meaning in mind; but an awareness of the chattel slavery practiced in British sugar colonies also surely lurked behind such declamations. In Locke's time, these

actualities were becoming more directly evident, as the Royal African Company (founded 1672) increasingly profited by abducting Africans and taking them to a life of forced labor in the Americas. Scholars have long noted that Locke himself held stock in the Company and other ventures that profited from enslavement, and that he helped draft the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina (1669), a legal framework for nearly all territory between Virginia and Florida that granted each plantation owner “absolute power and authority over his negro slaves.” Several interpretations have been advanced as to how Locke could both detest and seem to condone enslavement. In [Chapter 1](#) of the first *Treatise* below, he finds slavery incompatible with “the generous temper and courage of our nation” (a common idea in Britain): perhaps he thought it was acceptable for people of other nations, or “races,” to be enslaved. The selection from the second *Treatise* repeats the ancient idea that combatants captured in a just war were enslavable: it is possible he tried to see people forcibly removed from Africa by Britons as such captives. More broadly, this fissure in Locke’s thinking has been seen as inherent to liberal capitalism, wherein the freedom to make a profit and own property overrides the freedoms of those whom the profiteer-owner exploits.

Some recent scholarship, however, has stressed the fierce antagonism between Locke and the Stuart monarchy which controlled the Royal African Company. Charles II and especially his brother, the Duke of York, later James II, fervently believed in the absolute authority held by some human beings over others and in hereditary rule and servitude. The latter belief was directly relevant to a system developing the idea that enslaved status is heritable. On this interpretation, Locke drafted the Fundamental Constitutions less as an ideologue than as legal secretary for the lords proprietors of the colony. He sold his stock in the RAC soon after he had received it as payment, and he applauded efforts to beat back the institution of slavery in Britain’s colonies. The disgust for slavery in the selections below may thus reflect a development in his thinking: perhaps all forms of slavery, including chattel slavery in British colonies, had



come to seem reprehensible to him. In any case, the selections indicate how fully theories of liberty in the period relied on understandings of slavery, and suggest a range of ways in which the two concepts would be entangled as liberty-loving Britain engaged more and more robustly in the trade in human beings in the decades after Locke.

# ***From Two Treatises of Government***

**From *Treatise 1: Of Government***

## **Chapter I [Introduction]**

1. Slavery is so vile and miserable an estate<sup>1</sup> of man, and so directly opposite to the generous temper and courage of our nation, that 'tis hardly to be conceived that an Englishman, much less a gentleman, should plead for it. And truly I should have taken Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*, as any other treatise which would persuade all men that they are slaves, and ought to be so, for such another exercise of wit as was his who writ the encomium of Nero;<sup>2</sup> rather than for a serious discourse meant in earnest, had not the gravity of the title and epistle, the picture in the front of the book,<sup>3</sup> and the applause that followed it, required me to believe that the author and publisher were both in earnest. I therefore took it into my hands with all the expectation, and read it through with all the attention, due to a treatise that made such a noise at its coming abroad, and cannot but confess myself mightily surprised that in a book, which was to provide chains for all mankind, I should find nothing but a rope of sand;<sup>4</sup> useful perhaps to such whose skill and business it is to raise a dust, and would blind the people the better to mislead them; but in truth not of any force to draw those into bondage who have their eyes open, and so much sense about them as to consider that chains are but an ill wearing,<sup>5</sup> how much care soever hath been taken to file and polish them.

2. If anyone think I take too much liberty in speaking so freely of a man who is the great champion of absolute power and the idol of those who worship it, I beseech him to make this small allowance for once, to one who, even after the reading of Sir Robert's book, cannot but think himself, as the laws allow him, a freeman. And I know no fault it is to do so, unless any one better skilled in the fate of it than I, should have it revealed to him that this treatise, which has lain dormant so long,<sup>6</sup> was, when it appeared in the world, to carry, by strength of its arguments, all liberty out of it; and that, from thenceforth, our author's short model was to be the pattern in

the mount,<sup>7</sup> and the perfect standard of politics for the future. His system lies in a little compass, it is no more but this,

“That all government is absolute monarchy.”

And the ground he builds on is this,

“That no man is born free.”

3. In this last age a generation of men has sprung up amongst us that would flatter princes with an opinion that they have a divine right to absolute power, let the laws by which they are constituted and are to govern, and the conditions under which they enter upon their authority, be what they will, and their engagements to observe them ever so well ratified by solemn oaths and promises. To make way for this doctrine, they have denied mankind a right to natural freedom; whereby they have not only, as much as in them lies, exposed all subjects to the utmost misery of tyranny and oppression, but have also unsettled the titles and shaken the thrones of princes (for they too, by these men’s system, except only one, are all born slaves, and by divine right are subjects to Adam’s right heir);<sup>8</sup> as if they had designed to make war upon all government, and subvert the very foundations of human society, to serve their present turn.

**From *Treatise 2: Of Civil Government***

## ***Chapter IV. Of Slavery***

22. The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule. The liberty of man in society is to be under no other legislative power, but that established, by consent, in the commonwealth; nor under the dominion of any will, or restraint of any law, but what that legislative shall enact, according to the trust put in it. Freedom then is not what sir Robert Filmer tells us, O. A. 55, "a liberty for every one to do what he lists, to live as he pleases, and not to be tied by any laws";<sup>9</sup> but freedom of men under government is to have a standing rule to live by, common to every one of that society, and made by the legislative power erected in it; a liberty to follow my own will in all things, where the rule prescribes not; and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man: as freedom of nature is to be under no other restraint but the law of nature.

23. This freedom from absolute, arbitrary power is so necessary to and closely joined with a man's preservation that he cannot part with it but by what forfeits his preservation and life together. For a man, not having the power of his own life, cannot by compact or his own consent enslave himself to any one, nor put himself under the absolute, arbitrary power of another, to take away his life, when he pleases.<sup>1</sup> Nobody can give more power than he has himself; and he that cannot take away his own life, cannot give another power over it. Indeed having by his fault forfeited his own life, by some act that deserves death; he, to whom he has forfeited it, may (when he has him in his power) delay to take it, and make use of him to his own service, and he does him no injury by it. For, whenever he finds the hardship of his slavery outweigh the value of his life, 'tis in his power, by resisting the will of his master, to draw on himself the death he desires.

24. This is the perfect condition of slavery, which is nothing else, but *the state of war continued, between a lawful conqueror and a*

*captive*.<sup>2</sup> For, if once compact enter between them,<sup>3</sup> and make an agreement for a limited power on the one side, and obedience on the other, the state of war and slavery ceases, as long as the compact endures. For, as has been said, no man can, by agreement, pass over to another that which he hath not in himself, a power over his own life.

I confess, we find among the Jews, as well as other nations, that men did sell themselves; but 'tis plain, this was only to drudgery, not to slavery. For it is evident the person sold was not under an absolute, arbitrary, despotical power. For the master could not have power to kill him, at any time, whom at a certain time, he was obliged to let go free out of his service; and the master of such a servant was so far from having an arbitrary power over his life, that he could not, at pleasure, so much as maim him, but the loss of an eye, or tooth, set him free, Exod. xxi.<sup>4</sup>

## Endnotes

1689–90

- Note 1: Situation or condition.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In his *Encomium Neronis* (1562), the Italian scholar Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576?) defends the notorious Roman emperor Nero (37–68 C.E.) against the prevailing portrayals of him in Roman and subsequent historiography as cruel and tyrannical.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Facing the title page of Filmer's *Patriarcha* was a large portrait of King Charles II (1630–1685). "Epistle": an introductory letter by the Royalist cleric and controversialist Peter Heylyn (1599–1662) praises Filmer's skill in political theory and argument.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Something not as strong or binding as it may seem.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An unsuitable kind of clothing.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Published posthumously in 1680, Filmer's *Patriarcha* was written in the late 1630s.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: See Hebrews 8:5. Locke says that Filmer presents his political theory as if it were the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Filmer claims that kings derive their authority from Adam, whose heirs they are, and who was created an absolute monarch over all humanity, but Locke argues that by Filmer's logic, Adam can have just one rightful heir, under whom even kings are slaves.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Locke quotes from page 55 of the 1679 republication of Filmer's *Observations upon Aristotle's Politics* (first published 1652).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In [Chapter 2](#), section 6 of the *Second Treatise*, Locke explained that the law of nature, which is essentially the will of God as reason reveals it to us, dictates that human beings may not commit suicide.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Locke invokes an ancient explanation and justification of slavery: it is permissible when a person captured in war would otherwise have been put to death, and the state of enslavement is essentially a continuation of the state of war between a "master" and an enslaved person, and a deferral of the death to which the enslaved person was earlier subject.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, once their relationship attains the status of a legal agreement.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Locke refers to [Chapter 21](#) of the biblical book of Exodus, which lays out the rules among ancient Jews for the buying and treatment of servants.[Return to reference 4](#)

## WILLIAM SNELGRAVE

By the time he published *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea, and the Slave Trade* (1734), the English sea captain William Snelgrave (1681–1743) had participated in the trafficking of enslaved Africans for some thirty years. Like other accounts of travel and true adventures in the period, his work is intended to give British readers a sense of what was going on along the edges of a growing empire that was making their home country rich. Packed with commentary and incidents, such as a history of the conflict between the African kingdoms of Whidaw (Xwéda) and Dahomey, and the story of Snelgrave's own kidnapping by pirates off the coast of Africa, the book also describes his role, and understanding of himself, as an enslaver. He says in his preface that he included this description to answer a friend "who had objected against the lawfulness of that trade." While his attempt to justify it is not very long or elaborate—he says he "will not here undertake to refute" all the objections to European practices of enslavement—he nonetheless presents some common rationalizations and a striking picture of a mind working to reconcile itself to trafficking in "these poor people," as he repeatedly calls those he holds in bondage aboard his ship. The account also indirectly suggests the nature and relative force of objections to the trade at Snelgrave's historical moment, decades before an extensive abolitionist movement had grown in North America and Britain toward the end of the century. Snelgrave insists that he treats those he has enslaved with kindness, which he says is both morally right and profitable: relatively humane treatment helps prevent uprisings of captured Africans aboard ship. But by laying stress on how frequently such uprisings occur, and on his own exceptional humanity, he implies that a general cruelty tends to dominate the trade. For a critical response to Snelgrave's characterizations of enslaving practices, see Anthony Benezet (below); and for direct, unvarnished views of the experience of



enslavement from those who endured it themselves, see firsthand accounts by Olaudah Equiano ([p. 1081](#)) and Ottobah Cugoano (below).

***From A New Account of Some Parts of  
Guinea, and the Slave Trade***<sup>[1](#)</sup>

## **From *Chapter 2***

Before I give a particular relation of the several mutinies among the Negro slaves, whereof I have been a witness, and which is to be the chief subject of this present book,<sup>2</sup> it will be very proper to prefix a short account of the manner how the Negroes become slaves; what numbers of them are yearly exported from Guinea;<sup>3</sup> and then offer a few words in justification of that trade.

As for the manner how those people become slaves; it may be reduced under these several heads.

I. It has been the custom among the Negroes, time out of mind, and is so to this day, for them to make slaves of all the captives they take in war. Now, before they had an opportunity of selling them to the white people,<sup>4</sup> they were often obliged to kill great multitudes, and when they had taken more than they could well employ in their own plantations, for fear they should rebel, and endanger their masters' safety.

2dly. Most crimes amongst them are punished by mulcts and fines; and if the offender has not wherewithal to pay the fine, he is sold for a slave; this is the practice of the inland people, as well as those on the seaside.

3dly. Debtors who refuse to pay their debts, or are insolvent, are likewise liable to be made slaves; but their friends may redeem them: and if they not able or willing to do it, then they are generally sold for the benefit of their creditors. But few of these come into the hands of the Europeans, being kept by their countrymen for their own use.

4thly. I have been told that it is common for some inland people to sell their children for slaves, though they are under no necessity for so doing; which I am inclined to believe. But I never observed that the people near the sea coast practice this, unless compelled thereto by extreme want and famine, as the people of Whidaw<sup>5</sup> have lately been.

Now by these means it is that so many of the Negroes become slaves, and specifically by being taken captive in war. Of these the number is so great that I may safely affirm without any exaggeration that the Europeans of all nations that trade to the coast of Guinea have in some years exported at least seventy thousand. And though this may no doubt be thought at first hearing a prodigious number; yet when 'tis considered how great the extent of this coast is, namely from Cape Verde to Angola, which is about four thousand miles in length; and that polygamy is allowed in general amongst them, by which means the countries are full of people, I hope it will not be thought improbable that so many are yearly exported from thence.

Several objections have often been raised against the lawfulness of this trade, which I shall not here undertake to refute. I shall only observe in general, that though to traffic in human creatures may at first sight appear barbarous, inhuman, and unnatural; yet the traders herein have as much to plead in their own excuse as can be said for some other branches of trade, namely, the advantage of it: and that not in regard of the merchants, but also of the slaves themselves,<sup>6</sup> as will plainly appear from these following reasons.

First, it is evident, that abundance of captives taken in war would be inhumanly destroyed, was there not an opportunity of disposing of them to the Europeans. So that at least many lives are saved; and great numbers of useful persons kept in being.

Secondly, when they are carried to the plantations, they generally live much better there, than they ever did in their own country; for as the planters pay a great price for them, 'tis in their interest to take care of them.<sup>7</sup>

Thirdly, by this means the English plantations have been so much improved, that 'tis almost incredible, what great advantages have accrued to the nation thereby; especially to the Sugar Islands,<sup>8</sup> which lying in a climate near as hot as the coast of Guinea, the Negroes are fitter to cultivate the lands there, than white people.

Then as to the criminals amongst the Negroes, they are by this means effectually transported, never to return again; a benefit which

we very much want here.<sup>9</sup>

In a word, from this trade proceed benefits far outweighing all either real or pretended mischiefs and inconveniences. And, let the worst that can be said of it, it will be found, like all other earthly advantages, tempered with a mixture of good and evil.

I come now to give an account of the mutinies that have happened on board the ships where I have been.

These mutinies are generally occasioned by the sailors' ill usage of these poor people, when on board the ships wherein they are transported to our plantations. Wherever therefore I have commanded, it has been my principal care to have the Negroes on board my ship kindly used; and I have always strictly charged my white people to treat them with humanity and tenderness; in which I have usually found my account,<sup>1</sup> both in keeping them from mutinying, and preserving them in health.

And whereas it may seem strange, to those that are unacquainted with the method of managing them, how we can carry so many hundreds together in a small ship, and keep them in order, I shall just mention what is generally practiced. When we purchase grown people, I acquaint them by the interpreter that, now they are become my property, I think fit to let them know what they are bought for, that they may be easy in their minds (for these poor people are generally under terrible apprehensions upon their being bought by white men, many being afraid that we design to eat them; which, I have been told, is a story much credited by the inland Negroes).<sup>2</sup> So after informing them, that they are bought to till the ground in our country, with several other matters, I then acquaint them how they are to behave themselves on board towards the white men; that if any one abuses them, they are to complain to the linguist,<sup>3</sup> who is to inform me of it, and I will do them justice; but if they make a disturbance, or offer to strike a white man, they must expect to be severely punished.

When we purchase the Negroes, we couple the sturdy men together with irons; but we suffer the women and children to go

freely about; and soon after we have sailed from the coast, we undo all the men's irons.<sup>4</sup>

They are fed twice a day, and are allowed in fair weather to come on deck at seven a clock in the morning, and to remain there, if they think proper, till sun setting. Every Monday morning they are served with pipes and tobacco, which they are very fond of. The men Negroes lodge separate from the women and children: and the places where they all lie are cleaned every day, some white men being appointed to see them do it.

\* \* \*

I have been several voyages when there has been no attempt made by our Negroes to mutiny; which, I believe, was owing chiefly to their being kindly used, and to my officers' care in keeping a good watch. But sometimes we meet with stout stubborn people amongst them, who are never to be made easy; and these are generally some of the Cormantines, a nation of the Gold Coast.<sup>5</sup> I went in the year 1721, in the *Henry* of London, a voyage to that part of the coast, and bought a good many of these people. We were obliged to secure them very well in irons, and watch them narrowly: Yet they nevertheless mutinied, though they had little prospect of succeeding. I lay at that time near a place called Mumfort<sup>6</sup> on the Gold Coast, having near five hundred Negroes on board, three hundred of which were men. Our ship's company consisted of fifty white people, all in health. And I had very good officers; so that I was very easy in all respects.

This mutiny began at midnight (the moon then shining very bright) in this manner. Two men that stood sentry at the forehatch way, where the men slaves came up to the house of office,<sup>7</sup> permitted four to go to that place; but neglected to lay the gratings again, as they should have done: whereupon four more Negroes came on deck, which had got their irons off, and the four in the house of office having done the same, all the eight fell on the two sentries, who immediately called out for help. The Negroes

endeavored to get their cutlasses from them, but the lineyards (that is the lines by which the handles of the cutlasses were fastened to the men's wrists) were so twisted in the scuffle that they could not get them off before we came to their assistance. The Negroes perceiving several white men coming towards them, with arms in their hands, quitted the sentries, and jumped over the ship's side into the sea.

I being by this time come forward on the deck, my first care was to secure the gratings, to prevent any more Negroes from coming up; and then I ordered people to get into the boat,<sup>8</sup> and save those that had jumped overboard, which they luckily did: for they found them all clinging to the cables the ship was moored by.

After we had secured these people, I called the linguists, and ordered them to bid the men Negroes between decks<sup>9</sup> be quiet (for there was a great noise amongst them). On their being silent, I asked what had induced them to mutiny? They answered, I was a great rogue to buy them, in order to carry them away from their own country; and that they were resolved to regain their liberty if possible. I replied that they had forfeited their freedom before I bought them, either by crimes, or by being taken in war, according to the custom of their country; and they being now my property, I was resolved to let them feel my resentment, if they abused my kindness; asking at the same time whether they had been ill used by the white men, or had wanted for anything the ship afforded. To this they replied, they had nothing to complain of. Then I observed to them that if they should gain their point<sup>1</sup> and escape to shore, it would be no advantage to them, because their countrymen would catch them, and sell them to other ships. This served my purpose, and they seemed to be convinced of their fault, begging I would forgive them, and promising for the future to be obedient and never mutiny again if I would not punish them this time. This I readily granted, and so they went to sleep. When daylight came we called the men Negroes up on deck, and examining their irons, found them all secure. So this affair happily ended, which I was very glad of; for these people are the stoutest and most sensible Negroes on the

coast; neither are they so weak<sup>2</sup> as to imagine as others do, that we buy them to eat them, being satisfied we carry them to work in our plantations, as they do in their own country.

However, a few days after this, we discovered they were plotting again, and preparing to mutiny. For some of the ringleaders proposed to one of our linguists, if he could procure them an ax, they would cut the cables the ship rid by<sup>3</sup> in the night; and so on her driving (as they imagined) ashore, they should get out of our hands, and then would become his servants as long as they lived.

For the better understanding of this I must observe here that these linguists are natives and freemen of the country, whom we hire on account of their speaking good English, during the time we remain trading on the coast; and they are likewise brokers between us and the Black merchants.

This linguist was so honest as to acquaint me with what had been proposed to him, and advised me to keep a strict watch over the slaves; for though he had represented to them the same as I had done on their mutinying before, that they would all be caught again, and sold to other ships, in case they could carry their point, and get on shore, yet it had no effect upon them.

This gave me a good deal of uneasiness. For I knew several voyages had proved unsuccessful by mutinies, as they occasioned either the total loss of the ships and the white men's lives; or at least by rendering it absolutely necessary to kill or wound a great number of the slaves, in order to prevent a total destruction. Moreover, I knew many of these Cormantine Negroes despised punishment, and even death itself; it having often happened at Barbados and other islands, that on their being any ways hardly dealt with to break them of their stubbornness in refusing to work, twenty or more have hanged themselves at a time in a plantation.

## Endnotes

1734

- Note 1: In its entirety, the title page reads, "A new account of some parts of Guinea, and the slave-trade, containing I. The



history of the late conquest of the Kingdom of Whidaw by the King of Dahomè. The Author's Journey to the Conqueror's C where he saw several Captives sacrificed, &c. II. The manner how the negroes become slaves. The Numbers of them yearly exported from Guinea to America. The Lawfulness of that Trade. The Mutinies among them on board the Ships where the Author has been, &c. III. A relation of the author's being taken by pirates, and the many Dangers he underwent." [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Snelgrave's *New Account* is divided into three books, of which this is the second. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: General name for the vast region in West Africa that lies along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: While current scholarship and accounts of the period bear out Snelgrave's assertion that Europeans primarily trafficked in people captured by African raiders, the transatlantic system of enslavement also relied on a crucial element not mentioned by him but stressed by many observers, such as Anthony Benezet (see below): European companies, operating out of numerous forts along the coast of Africa, often deliberately fomented wars between African nations in order to increase the number of prisoners of war to be enslaved. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Anglicized spelling of Xwéda (in the Yoruba language), a kingdom conquered and annexed by the Kingdom of Dahomey in 1727, in territory occupied in the present day by the Republic of Benin. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Snelgrave lists several commonly alleged "advantages" that enslavement conferred on Africans taken in the trade, though he omits perhaps the most commonly argued one: their potential conversion to Christianity. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Snelgrave's account is contradicted by present historians' estimates of extremely high rates of mortality, malnutrition, and disease, as well as accounts of wretched working and living conditions, endured by enslaved people on

sugar plantations in British and other European colonies in the Caribbean.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Islands in the Caribbean, principally Jamaica and Barbados, where British-controlled production of sugar was centered.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Snelgrave compares the enslavement of people found guilty of crimes in Africa to the penal transportation of convicted people from Britain to the colonies, often as indentured servants who were bound to a “master” to labor for a set period of time, a status that prisoners could accept as an alternative to being publicly hanged.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Found to be to my advantage. “Used”: treated.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Olaudah Equiano, himself from inland Africa, testifies to this belief in his own account of the Middle Passage (see p. 1090).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The interpreter just mentioned.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Snelgrave’s practice of unchaining captive Africans aboard ship would have been highly unusual; throughout his account, he oscillates between describing what is generally done by slavers to their captives and describing what he thinks are his own exceptionally humane methods.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Region along the upper coast of the Gulf of Guinea, from which gold and other natural resources extracted from inland were shipped. “Cormantines”: a term used by the English (after Fort Kormantine, used by enslavers in what is now central Ghana) for people of the Akan ethnic group, whose homeland is in what is now Ghana and the Ivory Coast.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Mumford, now a town in central Ghana.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The outhouse toilet on deck. “Forehatch”: hatch opening to below decks near the front of a ship.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A smaller boat lowered from the ship.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Space in the hull between two inner decks of a ship.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Succeed in their attempt.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Foolish. "Stoutest and most sensible": the reputation for prowess and intelligence of the people whom Snelgrave and other English people called Cormantines was long acknowledged, and furnishes one basis for the heroism of the protagonist of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (see p. 152).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A ship is said to "ride at anchor" when it is moored.[Return to reference 3](#)

## ANTHONY BENEZET

Born in France to Protestant parents, the educator, pacifist, abolitionist, and author Anthony Benezet (1713–1784) lived as a boy in London among members of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, and when his family emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1731, he developed ties with the Friends in Philadelphia, and built his career there. He founded a free school for Black people in Philadelphia in 1770, and in 1775, the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage (later known as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society), but his work as an activist began years earlier. Benezet's abolitionism grew from a long tradition of Quaker leadership in objecting to the trade in enslaved people, going back to the late seventeenth century, when a protest against it was launched in 1688 in Germantown, Pennsylvania. By Benezet's time, Quaker rules restricted members from participating in the trade, a position he helped publicize in 1759 with his *Observations on the Inslaving, Importing, and Purchasing of Negroes . . . from the Yearly-Meeting of the People Called Quakers*. He next published *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies, in a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions* (1766), which he subsequently revised and expanded, and finally produced *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1772), which repeats and expands passages of his earlier work yet further. In many ways, thanks to figures like Benezet, the abolitionist movement was underway in North America earlier than it was in Britain, where it gathered momentum in the 1780s.

Like Benezet's texts leading up to it, *Some Historical Account of Guinea* builds its case against enslavement by quoting arguments by other writers at length, and appending extensive selections from other polemics. It also describes the rich customs and cultures of numerous African societies to refute arguments made by enslavers (such as William Snelgrave; see above) that Africans are better off

enslaved on colonial sugar plantations. Benezet takes special care to analyze the way in which the trade operates in its entirety, not stopping with the observation that enslaved people taken by Europeans are often prisoners captured in African wars. He emphasizes how European traders encourage African elites to start conflicts and conduct raids into their enemies' territories for the sole purpose of supplying the trade. The presence and incentives of European traffickers have thus corrupted the nations of Africa. Finally, Benezet insists, to a degree unusual even among White abolitionists of his time, that Africans are endowed with talents and intelligence equal to those of people of European or any other descent, and that any appearances to the contrary derive from the dehumanizing effects of enslavement. This antiracist conviction had a profound moral influence on future abolitionists such as Thomas Clarkson (1760–1846), who considered Benezet a “venerable man” whose authority and experience as an educator amply testify to the fact that Black people “were as capable of the highest intellectual attainments” as any other human beings. In the excerpts below from *Some Account of Guinea*, Benezet passionately conjoins a statistical account of the enormity of suffering caused by enslavement with a dramatic awareness of that suffering's embodiment in the experience of individual Africans.

## ***From Some Historical Account of Guinea***

## ***Introduction***

The slavery of the Negroes having of late drawn the attention of many serious-minded people, several tracts have been published setting forth its inconsistency with every Christian and moral virtue, which it is hoped will have weight with the judicious, especially at a time when the liberties of mankind are become so much the subject of general attention. For the satisfaction of the serious enquirer who may not have the opportunity of seeing those tracts, and such others who are sincerely desirous that the iniquity of this practice may become effectually apparent to those in whose power it may be to put a stop to any farther progress therein, it is proposed hereby to republish the most material parts of said tracts;<sup>1</sup> and in order to enable the reader to form a true judgment of this matter, which, though so very important, is generally disregarded, or so artfully misrepresented by those whose interest leads them to vindicate it, as to bias the opinions of people otherwise upright; some account will be here given of the different parts of Africa, from which the Negroes are brought to America; with an impartial relation from what motives the Europeans were first induced to undertake and have since continued this iniquitous traffic.<sup>2</sup> And here it will not be improper to premise, that though wars, arising from the common depravity of human nature, have happened as well among the Negroes as other nations, and the weak sometimes been made captives to the strong; yet nothing appears, in the various relations of the intercourse and trade for a long time carried on by the Europeans on that coast, which would induce us to believe, that there is any real foundation for that argument so commonly advanced in vindication of that trade, viz. that the slavery of the Negroes took its rise from a desire in the purchasers to save the lives of such of them as were taken captives in war, who would otherwise have been sacrificed to the implacable revenge of their conquerors.<sup>3</sup> A plea which, when compared with the history of those times, will appear to be destitute of truth; and to have been advanced, and urged, principally by such as were concerned in

reaping the gain of this infamous traffic, as a palliation of that against which their own reason and conscience must have raised fearful objections.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: At the end of his book, Benezet gathers arguments against slavery by several writers, including the English abolitionist Granville Sharp (1735–1813), Scottish jurist George Wallace (1727–1805), Irish-Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), English Baptist minister James Foster (1697–1753), the American physician and (later) Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress Arthur Lee (1740–1792, not identified by name by Benezet), and the bishop of Gloucester, William Warburton (1698–1779). Benezet had also included many of these texts as appendices to his earlier antislavery tracts.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Several chapters of *Some Historical Account of Guinea* describe different cultures in West Africa, as well as accounts of the origins of the Portuguese and English trade in enslaved people.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: For a version of this argument, see William Snelgrave, above.[Return to reference 3](#)



## **Chapter 13**

When the vessels arrive at their destined port in the colonies,<sup>4</sup> the poor Negroes are to be disposed of to the planters; and here they are again exposed naked, without any distinction of sexes, to the brutal examination of their purchasers; and this, it may well be judged, is, to many, another occasion of deep distress. Add to this, that near connections must now again be separated, to go with their several purchasers; this must be deeply affecting to all, but such whose hearts are seared by the love of gain. Mothers are seen hanging over their daughters, bedewing their naked breasts with tears, and daughters clinging to their parents, not knowing what new stage of distress must follow their separation, or whether they shall ever meet again. And here what sympathy, what commiseration, do they meet with? Why, indeed, if they will not separate as readily as their owners think proper, the whipper is called for, and the lash exercised upon their naked bodies, till obliged to part. Can any human heart which is not become callous by the practice of such cruelties be unconcerned, even at the relation of such grievous affliction, to which this oppressed part of our species are subjected.

In a book printed in Liverpool called *The Liverpool Memorandum*, which contains, amongst other things, an account of the trade of that port, there is an exact list of the vessels employed in the Guinea trade, and of the number of slaves imported in each vessel; by which it appears that in the year 1753,<sup>5</sup> the number imported to America by one hundred and one vessels belonging to that port amounted to upwards of thirty thousand; and from the number of vessels employed by the African Company in London and Bristol,<sup>6</sup> we may, with some degree of certainty, conclude, there are one hundred thousand Negroes purchased and brought on board our ships yearly from the coast of Africa. This is confirmed in Anderson's history of trade and commerce, lately printed; where it is said, "That England supplies her American colonies with Negro slaves, amounting in number to above one hundred thousand every year."<sup>7</sup> When the

vessels are full freighted with slaves, they sail for our plantations in America, and may be two or three months in the voyage; during which time, from the filth and stench that is among them, distempers frequently break out, which carry off commonly a fifth, a fourth, yea sometimes a third or more of them: so that taking all the slaves together that are brought on board our ships yearly, one may reasonably suppose that at least ten thousand of them die on the voyage. And in a printed account of the state of the Negroes in our plantations, it is supposed that a fourth part, more or less, die at the different islands, in what is called the seasoning.<sup>8</sup> Hence it may be presumed that at a moderate computation of the slaves who are purchased by our African merchants in a year, near thirty thousand die upon the voyage, and in the seasoning. Add to this the prodigious number who are killed in the incursions and intestine wars,<sup>9</sup> by which the Negroes procure the number of slaves wanted to load the vessels. How dreadful then is this slave trade, whereby so many thousands of our fellow creatures, free by nature, endued with the same rational faculties, and called to be heirs of the same salvation with us, lose their lives, and are, truly and properly speaking, murdered every year! For it is not necessary, in order to convict a man of murder, to make it appear that he had an *intention* to commit murder; whoever does by unjust force or violence deprive another of his liberty, and, while he hath him in his power, continues so to oppress him by cruel treatment, as eventually to occasion his death, is actually guilty of murder. It is enough to make a thoughtful person tremble to think what a load of guilt lies upon our nation on this account; and that the blood of thousands of poor innocent creatures, murdered every year in the prosecution of this wicked trade, cries aloud to Heaven for vengeance. Were we to hear or read of a nation that destroyed every year, in some other way, as many human creatures as perish in this trade, we should certainly consider them as a very bloody, barbarous people; if it be alleged that the legislature hath encouraged and still does encourage this trade, it is answered, that no legislature on earth can alter the nature of things so as to make that to be right which is contrary to the law of God

(the supreme Legislator and Governor of the world) and opposeth the promulgation of the Gospel of *peace on earth, and good will to man*.<sup>1</sup> Injustice may be methodized and established by law, but still it will be injustice, as much as it was before; though its being so established may render men more insensible of the guilt, and more bold and secure in the perpetration of it.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: [Chapter 13](#) follows a chapter that excerpts journals of traders that document the brutality of the capture and transatlantic transport of enslaved Africans. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The book, printed for R. Williams, gives exact lists and statistics that document the trade in enslaved Africans by Liverpool's ships, though these pertain to the year 1752, not 1753 (the print date). [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The African Company of Merchants, established by the African Company Act of 1750, replaced the Royal African Company in 1752 and operated out of three English ports, Liverpool, Bristol, and London. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:  
From Adam Anderson, *An Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce, from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time* (London, 1764), volume 2, Appendix, [p. 68](#) (slightly misquoted, though 100,000 is Anderson's figure), which describes the Triangle Trade and concludes, "this trade therefore is extremely profitable to England" (69). The website [slavevoyages.org](http://slavevoyages.org) now estimates the number of enslaved Africans taken in ships flying the British flag at over 40,000 per year during peak years of the British trade; the discrepancy between this and the higher number presented by Anderson and Benezet may have to do with their uncertainty regarding the structure of the trade after the demise of the Royal African Company in 1750.

[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The grueling, often fatal period of adjustment of enslaved Africans to labor and life in a European colony in the West Indies. "Printed account": Benezet does not cite the source he has in mind. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Civil wars, or wars between African nations and peoples. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See Luke 2:14. [Return to reference 1](#)

## Chapter 14

Doubts may arise in the minds of some whether the foregoing accounts relating to the natural capacity and good disposition of the inhabitants of Guinea,<sup>2</sup> and of the violent manner in which they are said to be torn from their native land, are to be depended upon; as those Negroes who are brought to us are not heard to complain, and do but seldom manifest such a docility and quickness of parts, as is agreeable thereto.<sup>3</sup> But those who make these objections are desired to note the many discouragements the poor Africans labor under when brought from their native land. Let them consider that those afflicted strangers, though in an *enlightened Christian country*, have yet but little opportunity or encouragement to exert and improve their natural talents. They are constantly employed in servile labor; and the abject condition in which we see them naturally raises an idea of a superiority in ourselves; whence we are apt to look upon them as an ignorant and contemptible part of mankind. Add to this, that they meet with very little encouragement of freely conversing with such of the whites as might impart instruction to them. It is a fondness for wealth, for authority, or honor, which prompts most men in their endeavors to excel; but these motives can have little influence upon the minds of the Negroes, few of them having any reasonable prospect of any other than a state of slavery; so that, though their natural capacities were ever so good, they have neither inducement or opportunity to exert them to advantage. This naturally tends to depress their minds and sink their spirits into habits of idleness and sloth, which they would in all likelihood have been free from had they stood upon an equal footing with the white people. They are suffered,<sup>4</sup> with impunity, to cohabit together, without being married; and to part when solemnly engaged to one another as man and wife, notwithstanding the moral and religious laws of the land strictly prohibiting such practices. This naturally tends to beget apprehensions in the most thoughtful of those people, that we look upon them as a lower race, not worthy of the same care, nor liable to the same rewards and punishments as

ourselves. Nevertheless it may with truth be said, that both amongst those who have obtained their freedom, and those who remain in servitude, some have manifested a strong sagacity and an exemplary uprightness of heart. If this hath not been generally the case with them, is it a matter of surprise? Have we not reason to make the same complaint of many white servants when discharged from our service, though many of them have had much greater opportunities of knowledge and improvement than the blacks; who, even when free, labor under the same difficulties as before: having but little access to and intercourse with the most reputable white people, they remain confined within their former limits of conversation. And if they seldom complain of the unjust and cruel usage they have received, in being forced from their native country, &c. it is not to be wondered at; it being a considerable time after their arrival amongst us, before they can speak our language; and, by the time they are able to express themselves, they have great reason to believe that little or no notice would be taken of their complaints: yet let any person enquire of those who were capable of reflection, before they were brought from their native land, and he will hear such affecting relations, as, if not lost to the common feelings of humanity, will sensibly affect his heart. The case of a poor Negro, not long since brought from Guinea, is a recent instance of this kind. From his first arrival, he appeared thoughtful and dejected, frequently dropping tears when taking notice of his master's children, the cause of which was not known till he was able to speak English, when the account he gave of himself was that he had a wife and children in his own country; that some of these being sick and thirsty, he went in the night time, to fetch water at a spring, where he was violently seized and carried away by persons who lay in wait to catch men, from whence he was transported to America. The remembrance of his family, friends, and other connections, left behind, which he never expected to see any more, were the principal cause of his dejection and grief. Many cases, equally affecting, might be here mentioned; but one more instance, which fell under the notice of a person of credit,<sup>5</sup> will suffice. One of these

wretched creatures, then about 50 years of age, informed him, that being violently torn from a wife and several children in Guinea, he was sold in Jamaica, where never expecting to see his native land or family any more, he joined himself to a Negro woman, by whom he had two children: after some years, it suiting the interest of his owner to remove him, he was separated from his second wife and children, and brought to South Carolina, where, expecting to spend the remainder of his days, he engaged with a third wife, by whom he had another child; but here the same consequence of one man being subject to the will and pleasure of another man occurring, he was separated from this last wife and child, and brought into this country,<sup>6</sup> where he remained a slave. Can any whose mind is not rendered quite obdurate by the love of wealth hear these relations without being deeply touched with sympathy and sorrow? And doubtless the case of many, very many of these afflicted people, upon enquiry, would be found to be attended with circumstances equally tragical and aggravating. And if we enquire of those Negroes who were brought away from their native country when children, we shall find most of them to have been stolen away, when abroad from their parents, on the roads, in the woods, or watching their corn fields. Now you that have studied the book of conscience, and you that are learned in the law, what will you say to such deplorable cases? When, and how, have these oppressed people forfeited their liberty? Does not justice loudly call for its being restored to them? Have they not the same right to demand it as any of us should have, if we had been violently snatched by pirates from our native land? Is it not the duty of every dispenser of justice, who is not forgetful of his own humanity, to remember that these are men, and to declare them free? Where instances of such cruelty frequently occur, and are neither enquired into, nor redressed, by those whose duty it is *to seek judgment, and relieve the oppressed*, Isaiah i. 17. what can be expected, but that the groans and cries of these sufferers will reach Heaven; and what shall we do *when God riseth up? and when he visiteth*, what will ye answer him? *Did not he that made them, make us; and did not one fashion us in the womb?* Job xxxi. 14.

## Endnotes

1772

- Note 2: In his chapters on the cultures and governments of Africa, Benezet cites numerous sources that attest to the intelligence and moral character of Africans.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That matches the accounts of their strong intellects and good dispositions. "Parts": talents.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Permitted.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A trustworthy person.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pennsylvania.[Return to reference 6](#)



## CONFRONTING THE LAW

The 1770s saw a number of important cases and petitions challenging the legal status of slavery as an institution in Britain, its colonies, and, after 1776, the newly formed United States of America. The legal arena allowed enslaved and free Black people a significant opportunity to raise their voices and directly challenge the laws and nations that oppressed them. In Britain, the famous and far-reaching *Somerset* decision came early in the decade. James Somerset (born ca. 1741) was a Black man brought to England from Boston by his enslaver Charles Stewart in 1769. Baptized in England early in 1771, Somerset escaped from Stewart there but was recaptured later in the year and held in bondage on board a ship in the Thames bound for Jamaica. Somerset's three British godparents, sympathetic to the cause of abolition, challenged Somerset's abduction in the English Court of King's Bench, enlisting the help of the most famous British abolitionist of the day, Granville Sharp (1735–1815). The judge, William Murray, Lord Mansfield (1705–1793), finally ruled in 1772 to set Somerset free. Abolitionists and supporters of Somerset celebrated the decision in London as a major blow against slavery that effectively determined that it could not exist in England. But Mansfield's ruling was deliberately narrow. Some legal scholars think that its principal intent was simply to prevent "masters" (as the ruling calls them) from forcibly removing anyone they controlled—whether servants or enslaved people—from England. Also, Mansfield acknowledges that "positive law" could institute slavery, as it had indeed done in Virginia, Jamaica, and other British colonies. Still, some historians have suggested that the ruling panicked proslavery North Americans who thought it could lead to abolition throughout British dominions, and so led them to support the coming American War of Independence. Other historians have pointed out that Crown-appointed governors consistently vetoed efforts by some American colonial legislatures, inspired by the *Somerset* ruling, to end or curtail slavery themselves. In any

case, slavery would remain legal in British colonies some six decades after the ruling, not ending in most parts of the empire until 1833.

Among those inspired by the *Somerset* decision were the Black authors of a sequence of five antislavery petitions to the legislature of the province, then the state, of Massachusetts through the 1770s. The first of these, below, was submitted on January 6, 1773 and signed simply by “Felix”—a Latin name meaning happy, or fortunate—a writer who is otherwise unknown. (Some speculate that its author may be Felix Holbrook, an activist who was among the Black cosigners of another petition for the same cause a few months later.) He adopts a supplicatory tone in his address to Crown-appointed governor Thomas Hutchinson and the Massachusetts General Court, but he plainly and dramatically describes the dehumanizing condition of enslavement and asserts the dignity and natural rights of Black people. A subsequent petition, below, adopts an altogether more confrontational tone. It was presented by Prince Hall (ca. 1735/7–1807) and seven other Black Americans just months after the Declaration of Independence had created a new nation. The petition has been seen as the first time the Declaration’s ideals of liberty and natural rights were expanded beyond the context of Americans’ struggle against the British Empire. Hall and his copetitioners invoke these ideals instead to expose grave injustices within the new United States itself. They insist that, by permitting slavery, the new nation exists in gross disharmony with its own founding principles. A free man by 1770, Hall was a leader of his community in Boston and wrote numerous subsequent petitions, articles, and speeches supportive of Black people and protective of their rights. These petitions by Black authors did not lead to any legislative successes. But they doubtless influenced the Massachusetts State Constitution (ratified 1780), which declared that “all men are born free and equal”—language that would directly allow a constitutional ruling in 1783 that made slavery illegal in the state. The final legal document below indicates that even within Britain, enslavement subsisted after the *Somerset* case. The great man of letters Samuel Johnson wrote this brief in 1777 on behalf of Joseph Knight, a Black man enslaved

in Scotland who sought to leave the man who held him. Johnson's brief echoes Locke's account of slavery, extends the logic of Mansfield's *Somerset* ruling by calling the laws supporting slavery in Jamaica "merely positive," and, like Prince Hall, disputes the acceptability of slavery in general by invoking "the rights of mankind" and insisting that all people are "by nature free."



# WILLIAM MURRAY, LORD MANSFIELD

## The *Somerset* Ruling<sup>1</sup>

*Trinity Term, June 22, 1772*

Lord Mansfield—On the part of Somerset, the case which we gave notice should be decided this day, the court now proceeds to give its opinion. I shall recite the return to the writ of *habeas corpus*, as the ground of our determination; omitting only words of form.<sup>2</sup> The captain of the ship on board of which the Negro was taken makes his return to the writ in terms signifying that there have been, and still are, slaves to a great number in Africa; and that the trade in them is authorized by the laws and opinions<sup>3</sup> of Virginia and Jamaica; that they are goods and chattels; and, as such, saleable and sold. That James Somerset is a Negro of Africa, and long before the return of the king's writ was brought to be sold, and was sold to Charles Stewart, Esq. then in Jamaica, and has not been manumitted<sup>4</sup> since; that Mr. Stewart, having occasion to transact business, came over hither, with an intention to return; and brought Somerset to attend and abide with him, and to carry him back as soon as the business should be transacted. That such intention has been, and still continues; and that the Negro did remain till the time of his departure in the service of his master Mr. Stewart, and quitted it without his consent; and thereupon, before the return of the king's writ, the said Charles Stewart did commit the slave on board the *Anne and Mary*,<sup>5</sup> to safe custody, to be kept till he should set sail, and then to be taken with him to Jamaica, and there sold as a slave. And this is the cause why he, Captain Knowles, who was then and now is, commander of the above vessel, then and now lying in the river of Thames, did the said Negro, committed to his custody, detain; and on which he now renders him to the orders of the court.

We pay all due attention to the opinion of Sir Philip Yorke, and Lord Chief Justice Talbot,<sup>6</sup> whereby they pledged themselves to the British planters, for all the legal consequences of slaves coming over to this kingdom or being baptized, recognized by Lord Hardwicke, sitting as Chancellor on the 19th of October, 1749, that trover would lie;<sup>7</sup> that a notion had prevailed, if a Negro came over, or became a Christian, he was emancipated, but no ground in law:<sup>8</sup> that he and Lord Talbot, when Attorney- and Solicitor-General,<sup>9</sup> were of opinion, that no such claim for freedom was valid; that though the Statute of Tenures had abolished villeins<sup>1</sup> regardant to a manor, yet he did not conceive but that a man might still become a villein in gross,<sup>2</sup> by confessing himself such in open court. We are so well agreed that we think there is no occasion of having it argued (as I had intimated an intention at first) before all the judges, as is usual, for obvious reasons, on a return to a *habeas corpus*;<sup>3</sup> the only question before us is, whether the cause on the return is sufficient? If it is, the Negro must be remanded; if it is not, he must be discharged. Accordingly, the return states, that the slave departed and refused to serve; whereupon he was kept to be sold abroad. So high an act of dominion must be recognized by the law of the country where it is used. The power of a master over his slave has been extremely different in different countries. The state of slavery is of such a nature, that it is incapable of being introduced on any reasons, moral or political, but only by positive law, which preserves its force long after the reasons, occasion, and time itself from whence it was created, is erased from memory. It is so odious, that nothing can be suffered to support it, but positive law.<sup>4</sup> Whatever inconveniences, therefore, may follow from the decision, I cannot say this case is allowed or approved by the law of England;<sup>5</sup> and therefore the black must be discharged.

## Endnotes

1772, 1776

- Note 1: An authoritative transcript of the decision, from which the text is taken, appeared in *Reports of Cases Adjudged in the Court of King's Bench* (1776) compiled by Capel Lofft (1751–1824).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Legal formulae. "Return": the legal reply to the court by John Knowles, the captain of the ship where James Somerset was held after being recaptured. "Writ of *habeas corpus*": legal document enacting *habeas corpus* (Latin; literally, "you have the body"). Such a writ, produced by a court, demands that a prisoner be brought before it to determine the legality of the prisoner's detention. "Ground": basis. Judge Mansfield declares he will summarize, as the basis of his decision, the answer of Knowles to the court's writ of *habeas corpus*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Legal opinions of the courts.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Legally freed. "King's writ": the answer to the court's writ, in the name of the king, of *habeas corpus*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The ship captained by Knowles on which Somerset was held in bondage after he was recaptured.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Charles Talbot, first baron Talbot (1685–1737), British lawyer and government minister. Sir Philip Yorke (1690–1764), later first Earl of Hardwicke, British lawyer and minister, offered an opinion with Talbot in 1729 that slavery was allowed under English law and that neither becoming baptized nor coming to Britain would immediately free an enslaved person, who could be forcibly transported back to the colonies. Though the Yorke-Talbot opinion was not legally binding and cited no legal precedents or rationale, it was widely accepted, especially by enslavers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The legal claim of possession (trover) would be sustainable.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The common assumption among the British that if baptized, or upon moving to Britain, an enslaved person would immediately be free, had no basis in law.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: The attorney-general and solicitor-general are senior legal advisors to the Crown.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Under British medieval law, villeins were serfs bound for life to work at a manor: though they had more rights than enslaved people, they lay under heavy legal restrictions, could not move from the land where they were bound to work, and often inherited their status from their parents. “Statute of Tenures”: another name for the Tenure Abolition Act of 1660, which changed the nature of titles to land.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Unlike a villein bound to a manor, a villein in gross was bound to a particular lord; Mansfield compares this to the relationship of Somerset to Stewart and points out that the Tenure Abolition Act did not affect the legal standing of such a relationship.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mansfield says he accepts the soundness of all this legal reasoning, so there is no reason to argue in court about Stewart and Knowles’s return to the court’s writ; the only question that remains is whether the return’s reasoning is strong enough to justify slavery in Britain.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Mansfield’s ruling suggests that tradition alone, the assumptions of common law, or mere legal opinions such as that of Yorke and Talbot are not enough to justify the institution of slavery in a country. He indicates that in places where positive laws concerning slavery do exist, such as Virginia and Jamaica, it has a sufficient legal basis.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Mansfield’s reference to the law of England seemed to leave the question of slavery open in other parts of Britain, though later in the decade the Joseph Knight case in Scotland (see Samuel Johnson, below) referred to the *Somerset* decision as a precedent.[Return to reference 5](#)



# FELIX'S PETITION<sup>1</sup>

Province of the Massachusetts Bay to His Excellency Thomas Hutchinson, Esq; Governor; to the Honorable His Majesty's Council, and to the Honorable House of Representatives<sup>2</sup> in General Court assembled at Boston, the 6th Day of January, 1773. The humble petition of many slaves, living in the town of Boston, and other towns in the Province is this, namely that your Excellency and Honors, and the honorable [. . .] Representatives, would be pleased to take their unhappy state and condition under your wise and just consideration.

We desire to bless God, who loves mankind, who sent his son to die for their salvation, and who is no respecter of persons;<sup>3</sup> that he hath lately put it into the hearts of multitudes on both sides of the water, to bear our burthens, some of whom are men of great note and influence; who have pleaded our cause with arguments which we hope will have their weight with this honorable court.<sup>4</sup>

We presume not to dictate to your excellency and honors, being willing to rest our cause on your humanity and justice; yet would beg leave to say a word or two on the subject. Although some of the Negroes are vicious (who doubtless may be punished and restrained by the same laws which are in force against other of the king's subjects) there are many others of a quite different character, and who, if made free, would soon be able as well as willing to bear a part in the public charges; many of them of good natural parts,<sup>5</sup> are discreet, sober, honest, and industrious; and may it not be said of many, that they are virtuous and religious, although their condition is in itself so unfriendly to religion, and every moral virtue except patience. How many of that number have there been, and now are in this province, who have had every day of their lives embittered with this most intolerable reflection, that, let their behavior be what it will, neither they, nor their children to all generations, shall ever be

able to do, or to possess and enjoy anything, no, not even life itself, but in a manner as the beasts that perish.<sup>6</sup>

We have no property! We have no wives! No children! We have no city! No country!<sup>7</sup> But we have a Father in heaven, and we are determined, as far as his grace shall enable us, and as far as our degraded contemptuous life will admit, to keep all his commandments: Especially will we be obedient to our masters, so long as God in his sovereign Providence shall suffer us to be holden in bondage.

It would be impudent, if not presumptuous in us, to suggest to your excellency and honors any law or laws proper to be made, in relation to our unhappy state, which, although our greatest unhappiness, is not our fault; and this gives us great encouragement to pray and hope for such relief as is consistent with your wisdom, justice, and goodness.

We think ourselves very happy that we may thus address the great and general court of this province, which great and good court is to us the best judge, under God, of what is wise, just, and good.

We humbly beg leave to add but this one thing more: we pray for such relief only, which by no possibility can ever be productive of the least wrong or injury to our masters; but to us will be as life from the dead.

Signed,  
FELIX

1773

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The petition was printed in Boston in an antislavery tract, *The Appendix: Or, Some Observations on the Expediency of the Petition of the Africans, Living in Boston &c., Lately Presented to the General Assembly of This Province* (1773).[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The Massachusetts House of Representatives, the lower house of the Massachusetts General Court, was composed of representatives elected by the towns in the Royal Province of Massachusetts Bay (1692–1774). “His Majesty’s Council”: the Massachusetts Council consisted of twenty-eight members who were elected by the General Court but whose election was subject to the veto of the royal governor. “Thomas Hutchinson”: Hutchinson (1711–1780), royal governor of Massachusetts Bay (1771–74) appointed by the king, was a prominent Loyalist politician and focus of radicals’ anger in Massachusetts.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Makes no distinctions among people according to their rank, wealth, or social importance.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Felix likely refers to numerous abolitionists in North America and Britain, including Anthony Benezet of Philadelphia and Granville Sharp, who argued on behalf of James Somerset in the *Somerset* case in British court in 1772.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Talents and abilities. “Public charges”: taxes to support public projects and the poor.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See Psalms 49:12 and 20.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Treated as property and having no legal status as citizens, enslaved people strictly speaking have no city or country, and likewise do not have marital or parental relations acknowledged by the laws.[Return to reference 7](#)

# PRINCE HALL<sup>1</sup>

## [A Petition to the State of Massachusetts]

To the Honorable Counsel & House of Representatives for the State of Massachusetts Bay<sup>2</sup> in General Court assembled, January 13, 1777:

The petition of a great number of Blacks detained in a state of slavery in the bowels of a free and Christian country humbly sheweth that your petitioners apprehend that they have, in common with all other men, a natural and unalienable right to that freedom which the Great Parent of the Universe hath bestowed equally on all mankind, and which they have never forfeited by any compact or agreement<sup>3</sup> whatever—but they were unjustly dragged by the hand of cruel power from their dearest friends, and some of them even torn from the embraces of their tender parents—from a populous, pleasant, and plentiful country; and, in violation of laws of nature and of nations, and in defiance of all the tender feelings of humanity, brought here either to be sold like beast[s] of burthen, and like them condemned to slavery for life—among a people professing the religion of Jesus, a people not insensible of the secrets of rationable being, nor without spirit to resent the unjust endeavors of others to reduce them to a state of bondage and subjection.<sup>4</sup> Your honors need not to be informed that a life of slavery like that of your petitioners, deprived of every social privilege, of everything requisite to render life tolerable, is far worse than nonexistence.

In imitation of the laudable example of the good people of these States, your petitioners have long and patiently waited the event of petition after petition,<sup>5</sup> by them presented to the legislative body of this state, and cannot but with grief reflect that their success hath been but too similar.<sup>6</sup> They cannot but express their astonishment

that it has never been considered that every principle from which America has acted in the course of their unhappy difficulties with Great Britain pleads stronger than a thousand arguments in favor of your petitioners. They therefore humbly beseech your honors to give this petition its due weight and consideration, and cause an act of the legislature to be passed whereby they may be restored to the enjoyments of that which is the natural right of all men—and their children, who were born in this land of liberty, may not be held as slaves after they arrive at the age of twenty-one years. So may the inhabitants of these states be no longer chargeable with the inconsistency of acting themselves the part which they condemn and oppose in others. Be prospered in their present glorious struggle for liberty<sup>2</sup> and have those blessings to them, &c.

## Endnotes

1777

- Note 1: Though historians often single out Prince Hall as the petition's principal author, its signers include seven other Black Bostonians: Peter Bestes (who was primary signatory of an earlier petition submitted in April 1773), Lancaster Hill, Brister Slensen (or Slenser), Jack Pierpont, Nero Sunelo, Newport Sumner, and Job Lock. The following is transcribed, with spelling and punctuation regularized, from a manuscript now held by the Massachusetts Historical Society.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: After the Declaration of Independence of 1776, Massachusetts had become a member state of the United States of America, retaining its governmental structure from colonial times of a Council of twenty-eight elected members, and a lower House of Representatives. After the state constitution was ratified in 1780, a State Senate would constitute the upper house.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hall and the cosigners refer to the common idea, invoked by John Locke and other political theorists, that one can agree by contract to forfeit one's freedom to another (though

Locke denied that one could contract oneself to enslavement).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The petition directly alludes to the White North American colonists' rhetoric in their ongoing struggles against their subjugation to the British Crown. "Rationable": reasonable, or having the capacity of reason.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: At least four petitions by Black Americans and their supporters to end enslavement had been submitted to and rejected by the Crown-appointed governors of Massachusetts Bay.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The petition again alludes to the struggles of the former colonies, who sent numerous petitions to the British Crown asking for their grievances to be redressed. The unsatisfactory responses to these petitions led to the American War of Independence.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: When Hall and the rest submitted their petition in January 1777, the outcome of the War of Independence was uncertain. After a bad year, General George Washington had just won the Battle of Trenton (December 1776), which boosted morale; later in 1777, in October, the Continental Army would gain a yet more significant victory at Saratoga.[Return to reference 7](#)

# **SAMUEL JOHNSON**

## **[A Brief in Support of Joseph Knight]<sup>[1](#)</sup>**

It must be agreed that in most ages many countries have had part of their inhabitants in a state of slavery; yet it may be doubted whether slavery can ever be supposed the natural condition of man. It is impossible not to conceive that men in their original state were equal; and very difficult to imagine how one would be subjected to another but by violent compulsion. An individual may, indeed, forfeit his liberty by a crime; but he cannot by that crime forfeit the liberty of his children. What is true of a criminal seems true likewise of a captive. A man may accept life from a conquering enemy on condition of perpetual servitude; but it is very doubtful whether he can entail that servitude on his descendants; for no man can stipulate without commission for another. The condition which he himself accepts, his son or grandson perhaps would have rejected. If we should admit, what perhaps may with more reason be denied, that there are certain relations between man and man which may make slavery necessary and just, yet it can never be proved that he who is now suing for his freedom ever stood in any of those relations. He is certainly subject by no law, but that of violence, to his present master;<sup>[2](#)</sup> who pretends no claim to his obedience, but that he bought him from a merchant of slaves, whose right to sell him never was examined. It is said that according to the constitutions of Jamaica he was legally enslaved; these constitutions are merely positive;<sup>[3](#)</sup> and apparently injurious to the rights of mankind, because whoever is exposed to sale is condemned to slavery without appeal; by whatever fraud or violence he might have been originally brought into the merchant's power. In our own time princes have been sold, by wretches to whose care they were

entrusted, that they might have an European education; but when once they were brought to a market in the plantations, little would avail either their dignity or their wrongs.<sup>4</sup> The laws of Jamaica afford a Negro no redress. His color is considered as a sufficient testimony against him. It is to be lamented that moral right should ever give way to political convenience. But if temptations of interest are sometimes too strong for human virtue, let us at least retain a virtue where there is no temptation to quit it. In the present case there is apparent right on one side, and no convenience on the other. Inhabitants of this island can neither gain riches nor power by taking away the liberty of any part of the human species. The sum of the argument is this:—No man is by nature the property of another: The defendant is, therefore, by nature free: The rights of nature must be some way forfeited before they can be justly taken away: That the defendant has by any act forfeited the rights of nature we require to be proved; and if no proof of such forfeiture can be given, we doubt not but the justice of the court will declare him free.

## 1777**Endnotes**

1792

- Note 1:  
Johnson, a fierce opponent of slavery, dictated this brief to his biographer James Boswell, who worked on Knight's legal team, and who himself initially espoused but later opposed the abolitionist cause (see [p. 981](#)). The brief supports the appeal of Joseph Knight (born ca. 1753), a Black man who lived enslaved in Scotland. After reading of the *Somerset* decision (see above), he asserted his freedom. In 1778, a Scottish court finally found in favor of Knight, with one of the judges, Alexander Boswell, Lord Auchinleck (James Boswell's father), declaring slavery "unchristian," and Knight "our brother."  
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Knight was born in West Africa, taken by enslavers to Jamaica, and transferred, after payment, to a Captain Knight. He was then taken, after payment, by John Wedderburn of



Scotland, around 1766, who returned to Scotland with Knight around 1768.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Compare Lord Mansfield in the *Somerset* decision, who declares that only “positive law”—not common-law traditions but laws on the books—could institute an enslaving system. Here Johnson calls such laws “merely positive,” or artificial and arbitrarily imposed, as contrasted with the laws of nature.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:  
Johnson alludes to William Ansah Sessarakoo (ca. 1736–1770), an African prince born near Annamaboe (now Anomabu), West Africa, who was betrayed into enslavement in Barbados in 1744 by a British sea captain who had promised to bring him to London to be educated. Learning of the betrayal, the Royal African Company freed him. The British press widely reported an incident in 1749 in which Sessarakoo and an African companion attended a performance of Thomas Southerne’s play *Oroonoko, a Tragedy* (adapted from Aphra Behn’s novella), and left at the end of the fourth act in tears.  
[Return to reference 4](#)

## OTTOBAH CUGOANO

In 1787, Ottobah Cugoano (ca. 1757–after 1791) published the *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, one of the most searing, uncompromising indictments of slavery of his time. It appeared two years before another important abolitionist work by his friend and fellow Black activist, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789; see [p. 1081](#)). Cugoano's book is an impassioned philosophical, political, and religious polemic against the traffic in human beings, introduced by a brief description of his life in and abduction from West Africa. He relates that he spent "nine or ten months in the slave gang in Grenada, and about one year at different places in the West-Indies" before being brought to England at the end of 1772, where he learned to read and write and was baptized in 1773, under the name John Stuart, at age sixteen. After that, he was freed from enslavement and is known to have worked as a paid servant to the painters Robert and Maria Cosway, a position that opened the door to his correspondence with a number of important people, including George III himself, Edmund Burke, and the abolitionist Granville Sharp. In London he also met Equiano and other Black campaigners against slavery, and with them formed the Sons of Africa, a group of radicals, now recognized as the first Black political organization in Britain, who wrote letters to London newspapers advocating abolition of the transatlantic trade and of slavery itself. Two years after his *Thoughts and Sentiments* appeared, he published a shortened version of it in 1791, then disappeared from the historical record.

Unlike Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, which gains readers' sympathies by portraying its author as a gentle person brutalized by enslavers' inhumanity, Cugoano sustains a contemptuous outrage at the criminality of human trafficking. He attacks specific pamphlets that sought to justify slavery and enjoys the idea of seeing enslavers

“roasted, saddled, and bridled” like pigs and horses, a form of well-deserved or “condign punishment,” in which the victimizer becomes the victim. Like Equiano, Phillis Wheatley, Jupiter Hammon, and many other people who had experienced enslavement, Cugoano warmly embraces the religion of the Europeans. But in his hands, Christianity becomes a weapon of denunciation, a way to expose not only the barbarity of those actually perpetrating the trade but also the complacent hypocrisy of ordinary Britons who allow it to continue. Along the way, he relates “the history of those dreadfully perfidious methods of forming settlements and acquiring riches and territory” by Europeans in the Americas at fatal cost to Indigenous peoples, and compares and contrasts the suffering endured by the poor in European countries and that of enslaved people. By emphasizing the guilt accrued by Europeans on both sides of the Atlantic for their “horrible injustice and barbarous cruelty” in the name of their Christianity, Cugoano achieves a militancy unique among early Black abolitionists.

# ***From Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species***

## **[CRIMES OF THE TRADE; CUGOANO'S EARLY LIFE]**

No necessity, or any situation of men, however poor, pitiful and wretched they may be, can warrant them to rob others, or oblige them to become thieves, because they are poor, miserable and wretched. But the robbers of men,<sup>1</sup> the kidnappers, ensnarers, and slave-holders who take away the common rights and privileges of others to support and enrich themselves, are universally those pitiful and detestable wretches; for the ensnaring of others, and taking away their liberty by slavery and oppression, is the worst kind of robbery, as most opposite to every precept and injunction of the Divine Law, and contrary to that command which enjoins that *all men should love their neighbors as themselves, and that they should do unto others, as they would that men should do to them.*<sup>2</sup> As to any other laws that slave-holders may make among themselves, as respecting slaves, they can be of no better kind, nor give them any better character, than what is implied in the common report—that there may be some honesty among thieves. This may seem a harsh comparison, but the parallel is so coincident that, I must say, I can find no other way of expressing my thoughts and sentiments, without making use of some harsh words and comparisons against the carriers on of such abandoned wickedness. But, in this little undertaking, I must humbly hope the impartial reader will excuse such defects as may arise from want<sup>3</sup> of better education; and as to the resentment of those who can lay their cruel lash upon the backs of thousands, for a thousand times less crimes than writing against their enormous wickedness and brutal avarice, [such] is what I may be sure to meet with.

However, it cannot but be very discouraging to a man of my complexion in such an attempt as this, to meet with the evil aspersions of some men, who say that an African is not entitled to any competent degree of knowledge, or capable of imbibing any sentiments of probity; and that nature designed him for some inferior link in the chain, fitted only to be a slave. But when I meet with those who make no scruple to deal with the human species, as with the beasts of the earth, I must think them not only brutish, but wicked and base; and that their aspersions are insidious and false. And if such men can boast of greater degrees of knowledge than any African is entitled to, I shall let them enjoy all the advantages of it unenvied, as I fear it consists only in a greater share of infidelity, and that of a blacker kind than only skin deep. And if their complexion be not what I may suppose, it is at least the nearest in resemblance to an infernal hue. A good man will neither speak nor do as a bad man will; but if a man is bad, it makes no difference whether he be a black or a white devil.

By some of such complexion, as whether black or white it matters not,<sup>4</sup> I was early snatched away from my native country, with about eighteen or twenty more boys and girls, as we were playing in a field. We lived but a few days' journey from the coast where we were kidnapped, and as we were decoyed and drove along, we were soon conducted to a factory,<sup>5</sup> and from thence, in the fashionable way of traffic, consigned to Grenada.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it may not be amiss to give a few remarks, as some account of myself, in this transposition of captivity.

I was born in the city of Agimaque, on the coast of Fantyn; my father was a companion to the chief in that part of the country of Fantee,<sup>7</sup> and when the old king died I was left in his house with his family; soon after I was sent for by his nephew, Ambro Accasa, who succeeded the old king in the chieftdom of that part of Fantee known by the name of Agimaque and Assinee.<sup>8</sup> I lived with his children, enjoying peace and tranquility, about twenty moons, which, according to their way of reckoning time, is two years. I was sent for to visit an uncle who lived at a considerable distance from

Agimaque. The first day after we set out we arrived at Assinee, and the third day at my uncle's habitation, where I lived about three months, and was then thinking of returning to my father and young companion at Agimaque; but by this time I had got well acquainted with some of the children of my uncle's hundreds of relations, and we were some days too venturesome in going into the woods to gather fruit and catch birds, and such amusements as pleased us. One day I refused to go with the rest, being rather apprehensive that something might happen to us; till one of my play-fellows said to me, "because you belong to the great men, you are afraid to venture your carcass, or else of the *bounsam*," which is the devil. This enraged me so much that I set a resolution to join the rest, and we went into the woods as usual; but we had not been above two hours before our troubles began, when several great ruffians came upon us suddenly, and said we had committed a fault against their lord, and we must go and answer for it ourselves before him.<sup>9</sup>

Some of us attempted in vain to run away, but pistols and cutlasses were soon introduced, threatening that if we offered to stir, we should all lie dead on the spot. One of them pretended to be more friendly than the rest, and said that he would speak to their lord to get us clear, and desired that we should follow him; we were then immediately divided into different parties, and drove after him. We were soon led out of the way which we knew, and towards the evening, as we came in sight of a town, they told us that this great man of theirs lived there, but pretended it was too late to go and see him that night. Next morning there came three other men, whose language differed from ours, and spoke to some of those who watched us all the night, but he that pretended to be our friend<sup>1</sup> with the great man, and some others, were gone away. We asked our keepers what these men had been saying to them, and they answered that they had been asking them and us together to go and feast with them that day, and that we must put off seeing the great man till after; little thinking that our doom was so nigh, or that these villains meant to feast on us as their prey. We went with them again about half a day's journey, and came to a great multitude of people,

having different music playing; and all the day after we got there, we were very merry with the music, dancing, and singing. Towards the evening, we were again persuaded that we could not get back to where the great man lived till next day; and when bedtime came, we were separated into different houses with different people. When the next morning came, I asked for the men that brought me there, and for the rest of my companions; and I was told that they were gone to the seaside to bring home some rum, guns, and powder,<sup>2</sup> and that some of my companions were gone with them, and that some were gone to the fields to do something or other. This gave me strong suspicion that there was some treachery in the case, and I began to think that my hopes of returning home again were all over. I soon became very uneasy, not knowing what to do, and refused to eat or drink for whole days together, till the man of the house told me that he would do all in his power to get me back to my uncle; then I eat a little fruit with him, and had some thoughts that I should be sought after, as I would be then missing at home about five or six days. I enquired every day if the men had come back, and for the rest of my companions, but could get no answer of any satisfaction. I was kept about six days at this man's house, and in the evening there was another man came and talked with him a good while, and I heard the one say to the other he must go, and the other said the sooner the better; that man came out and told me that he knew my relations at Agimaque, and that we must set out tomorrow morning, and he would convey me there. Accordingly we set out next day, and travelled till dark, when we came to a place where we had some supper and slept. He carried a large bag with some gold dust, which he said he had to buy some goods at the seaside to take with him to Agimaque. Next day we travelled on, and in the evening came to a town, where I saw several white people, which made me afraid that they would eat me, according to our notion as children in the inland parts of the country.<sup>3</sup> This made me rest very uneasy all the night, and next morning I had some victuals brought, desiring me to eat and make haste, as my guide and kidnapper told me that he had to go to the castle<sup>4</sup> with some

company that were going there, as he had told me before, to get some goods. After I was ordered out, the horrors I soon saw and felt cannot be well described; I saw many of my miserable countrymen chained two and two, some hand-cuffed, and some with their hands tied behind. We were conducted along by a guard, and when we arrived at the castle, I asked my guide what I was brought there for, he told me to learn the ways of the *browfow*, that is the white-faced people. I saw him take a gun, a piece of cloth, and some lead for me, and then he told me that he must now leave me there, and went off. This made me cry bitterly, but I was soon conducted to a prison, for three days, where I heard the groans and cries of many, and saw some of my fellow captives. But when a vessel arrived to conduct us away to the ship, it was a most horrible scene; there was nothing to be heard but rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow men. Some would not stir from the ground, when they were lashed and beat in the most horrible manner. I have forgot the name of this infernal fort; but we were taken in the ship that came for us to another that was ready to sail from Cape Coast.<sup>5</sup> When we were put into the ship, we saw several Black merchants coming on board, but we were all drove into our holes, and not suffered to speak to any of them. In this situation we continued several days in sight of our native land; but I could find no good person to give any information of my situation to Accasa at Agimaque. And when we found ourselves at last taken away, death was more preferable than life, and a plan was concerted amongst us, that we might burn and blow up the ship, and to perish all together in the flames; but we were betrayed by one of our own countrywomen, who slept with some of the head men of the ship, for it was common for the dirty filthy sailors to take the African women and lie upon their bodies; but the men were chained and pent up in holes. It was the women and boys which were to burn the ship, with the approbation and groans of the rest; though that was prevented, the discovery was likewise a cruel bloody scene.

But it would be needless to give a description of all the horrible scenes which we saw, and the base treatment which we met with in



this dreadful captive situation, as the similar cases of thousands, which suffer by this infernal traffic, are well known. Let it suffice to say that I was thus lost to my dear indulgent parents and relations, and they to me. All my help was cries and tears, and these could not avail; nor suffered long, till one succeeding woe, and dread, swelled up another. Brought from a state of innocence and freedom, and, in a barbarous and cruel manner, conveyed to a state of horror and slavery: this abandoned situation may be easier conceived than described. From the time that I was kidnapped and conducted to a factory, and from thence in the brutish, base, but fashionable way of traffic, consigned to Grenada, the grievous thoughts which I then felt, still pant in my heart; though my fears and tears have long since subsided. And yet it is still grievous to think that thousands more have suffered in similar and greater distress, under the hands of barbarous robbers, and merciless taskmasters; and that many even now are suffering in all the extreme bitterness of grief and woe, that no language can describe. The cries of some, and the sight of their misery, may be seen and heard afar; but the deep-sounding groans of thousands, and the great sadness of their misery and woe, under the heavy load of oppressions and calamities inflicted upon them, are such as can only be distinctly known to the ears of Jehovah Sabaoth.<sup>6</sup>

This Lord of Hosts, in his great Providence, and in great mercy to me, made a way for my deliverance from Grenada.—Being in this dreadful captivity and horrible slavery, without any hope of deliverance, for about eight or nine months, beholding the most dreadful scenes of misery and cruelty, and seeing my miserable companions often cruelly lashed, and as it were cut to pieces, for the most trifling faults; this made me often tremble and weep, but I escaped better than many of them. For eating a piece of sugarcane, some were cruelly lashed, or struck over the face to knock their teeth out. Some of the stouter ones, I suppose often reprov'd, and grown hardened and stupid with many cruel beatings and lashings, or perhaps faint and pressed with hunger and hard labor, were often committing trespasses of this kind, and when detected, they met

with exemplary punishment.<sup>7</sup> Some told me they had their teeth pulled out to deter others, and to prevent them from eating any cane in future. Thus seeing my miserable companions and countrymen in this pitiful, distressed, and horrible situation, with all the brutish baseness and barbarity attending it, could not but fill my little mind<sup>8</sup> with horror and indignation. But I must own, to the shame of my own countrymen, that I was first kidnapped and betrayed by some of my own complexion, who were the first cause of my exile and slavery; but if there were no buyers there would be no sellers. So far as I can remember, some of the Africans in my country keep slaves, which they take in war, or for debt; but those which they keep are well fed, and good care taken of them, and treated well; and, as to their clothing, they differ according to the custom of the country. But I may safely say that all the poverty and misery that any of the inhabitants of Africa meet with among themselves is far inferior to those inhospitable regions of misery which they meet with in the West Indies, where their hard-hearted overseers have neither regard to the laws of God, nor the life of their fellow men.<sup>9</sup>

Thanks be to God, I was delivered from Grenada, and that horrid brutal slavery.—A gentleman coming to England, took me for his servant,<sup>1</sup> and brought me away, where I soon found my situation become more agreeable. After coming to England, and seeing others write and read, I had a strong desire to learn, and getting what assistance I could, I applied myself to learn reading and writing, which soon became my recreation, pleasure, and delight; and when my master perceived that I could write some, he sent me to a proper school for that purpose to learn. Since, I have endeavored to improve my mind in reading, and have sought to get all the intelligence I could, in my situation of life, towards the state of my brethren and countrymen in complexion, and of the miserable situation of those who are barbarously sold into captivity, and unlawfully held in slavery.

But, among other observations, one great duty I owe to Almighty God (the thankful acknowledgement I would not omit for any

consideration) that, although I have been brought away from my native country, in that torrent of robbery and wickedness, thanks be to God for his good providence<sup>2</sup> towards me; I have both obtained liberty, and acquired the great advantages of some little learning, in being able to read and write, and what is still infinitely of greater advantage I trust, to know something of HIM *who is that God whose providence rules over all, and who is the only Potent One that rules in the nations over the children of men. It is unto Him, who is the Prince of the Kings of the earth, that I would give all thanks.* And, in some manner, I may say with Joseph, as he did with respect to the evil intention of his brethren, when they sold him into Egypt,<sup>3</sup> that whatever evil intentions and bad motives those insidious robbers had in carrying me away from my native country and friends, I trust, was what the Lord intended for my good. In this respect, I am highly indebted to many of the good people of England for learning and principles unknown to the people of my native country. But above all, what have I obtained from the Lord God of Hosts, the God of the Christians! in that divine revelation of the only true God, and the Savior of men, what a treasure of wisdom and blessings are involved? How wonderful is the divine goodness displayed in those invaluable books the Old and New Testaments, that inestimable compilation of books, the Bible? And O what a treasure to have, and one of the greatest advantages to be able to read therein, and a divine blessing to understand!

#### **[ON BRITAIN'S COLLECTIVE GUILT]**

But while ever such a horrible business as the slavery and oppression of the Africans is carried on, there is not one man in all Great Britain and her colonies, that knoweth anything of it, can be innocent and safe, unless he speedily riseth up with abhorrence of it in his own judgment, and, to avert evil, declare himself against it, and all such notorious wickedness. But should the contrary be adhered to, as it has been in the most shameful manner, by men of eminence and power; according to their eminence in station, the nobles and senators,<sup>4</sup> and every man in office and authority, must

incur a double load of guilt, and not only that burden of guilt in the oppression of the African strangers, but also in that of an impending danger and ruin to their country; and such a double load of iniquity must rest upon those guilty heads who withhold their testimony against the crying sin of tolerating slavery. The inhabitants in general who can approve of such inhuman barbarities must themselves be a species of unjust barbarians and inhuman men. But the clergy of all denominations, whom we would consider as the devout messengers of righteousness, peace, and good-will to all men, if we find any of them ranked with infidels and barbarians, we must consider them as particularly responsible, and, in some measure, guilty of the crimes of other wicked men in the highest degree. For it is their duty to warn every man and to teach every man to know their errors; and if they do not, the crimes of those under their particular charge must rest upon themselves, and upon some of them, in such a case as this, that of the whole nation in general; and those (whatever their respective situation may be) who forbid others to assist them, must not be very sensible of their own duty, and the great extensiveness and importance of their own charge. And as it is their great duty to teach men righteousness and piety; this ought to be considered as sufficiently obvious unto them, and to all men, that nothing can be more contrary unto it, than the evil and very nature of enslaving men, and making merchandise of them like the brute creation.

For it is evident that no custom established among men was ever more impious; since it is contrary to reason, justice, nature, the principles of law and government, and the whole doctrine, in short, of natural religion,<sup>5</sup> and the revealed voice of God. And therefore, that it is both evident and expedient, that there is an absolute necessity to abolish the slave trade, and the West India slavery; and that to be in power, and to neglect even a day in endeavoring to put a stop to such monstrous iniquity and abandoned wickedness (as the tenure of every man's life, as well as the time of his being in office and power, is very uncertain) must necessarily endanger a man's own eternal welfare, be he ever so great in temporal dignity.<sup>6</sup>

The higher that any man is exalted in power and dignity, his danger is the more eminent, though he may not live to see the evil that may eventually be contributed to his country, because of his disobedience to the law and commandments of God. All men in authority, and kings in general, who are exalted to the most conspicuous offices of superiority, while they take upon themselves to be the administrators of righteousness and justice to others, they become equally responsible for admitting or suffering others under their authority to do wrong. Wherefore the highest offices of authority among men are not so desirable as some may be apt to conceive; it was so considered by the virtuous Queen Anne, when she was called to the royal dignity, as she declared to the council of the nation, that it was a heavy weight and burden brought upon her. For kings are the ministers of God to do justice, and not to bear the sword in vain, but to revenge wrath upon them that do evil. But if they do not in such a case as this, the cruel oppressions of thousands, and the blood of the murdered Africans who are slain by the sword of cruel avarice, must rest upon their own guilty heads in as eventually and plain a sense as it was David that murdered Uriah;<sup>7</sup> and therefore they ought to let no companies of insidious merchants, or any guileful insinuations of wicked men, prevail upon them to establish laws of iniquity, and to carry on a trade of oppression and injustice; but they ought to consider such as the worst of foes and rebels, and greater enemies than any that can rise up against their temporal dignity. From all such enemies, good Lord, deliver them! for it is even better to lose a temporal kingdom, than only to endanger the happiness and enjoyment of an eternal one.

Nothing else can be conceived but that the power of infernal wickedness has so reigned and pervaded over the enlightened nations as to infatuate and lead on the great men, and the kings of Europe, to promote and establish such a horrible traffic of wickedness as the African slave trade and the West India slavery, and thereby to bring themselves under the guilty responsibility of such awful iniquity. The kings and governors of the nations in general have power to prevent their subjects and people from

enslaving and oppressing others, if they will; but if they do not endeavor to do it, even if they could not effect that good purpose, they must then be responsible for their crimes; how much more, if they make no endeavors towards it, even when they can, and where no opposition, however plausible their pretenses might be, would dare to oppose them. Wherefore, if kings or nations or any men that dealeth unjustly with their fellow-creatures, to ensnare them, to enslave them, and to oppress them, or suffer others to do so, when they have it in their power to prevent it, and yet they do not, can it ever be thought that God will be well pleased with them? For can those which have no mercy on their fellow creatures expect to find mercy from the gracious Father of Men? Or will it not rather be said unto them, as it is declared, *that he who leadeth into captivity, shall be carried captive, and be bound in the cords of his own iniquity: Though hand join in hand the wicked shall not go unpunished; for sin and wickedness is the destruction of any people.*<sup>8</sup>

And should these nations, in the most obnoxious<sup>9</sup> and tenacious manner, still adhere to it as they have done, and continue to carry on in their colonies such works and purposes of iniquity, in oppression and injustice against the Africans, nothing else can be expected for them at last, but to meet with the fierce wrath of Almighty God, for such a combination of wickedness, according to all the examples of his just retribution, who cannot suffer such deliberate, such monstrous iniquity to go long unpunished.

## Endnotes

1787

- Note 1: The epigraph of Cugoano's book, "He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or maketh merchandize of him, or if he be found in his hand: then that thief shall die," is an expansion of Exodus 21:16.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Cugoano's adaptation of Matthew 22:39 and 7:12.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Lack.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: While apologists for slavery stressed African participation in the slave trade as a way to reduce European culpability for it, Cugoana here defers discussion of the race of the kidnappers, which he will discuss below.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A permanent outpost of European enslavers, of which there were many along the west coast of Africa. "Drove along": driven along on foot.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The island of Grenada was taken in 1762 by the British from the French during the Seven Years' War and became a hub of British enslavement in the Caribbean. "Fashionable way of traffic": usual method of the transatlantic enslaving system.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Fante, an Akan people, inhabited and still inhabit the central and western coastal regions of what is now Ghana. "Fantyn": a coastal area inhabited by the Fante. "Agimaque": now Ajumako, a town on this coast.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Assinie, now the town of Assinie-Mafia, on the south coast of what is now the Ivory Coast. "Ambro Accasa": a chief of the Fante.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Accusations of crime were a common pretext used by kidnappers who supplied the trade in enslaved people.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Advocate.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Items commonly traded by Europeans for those they enslaved.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The supposed cannibalism of White traders was a common theme among Africans preyed on by the European trade, especially those from the interior.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Another term used for a factory, or fort, used by European enslavers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: City and port on the central coast of what is now Ghana.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Lord of Hosts (Hebrew).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Punishment intended to deter others from acting in this way. "Stupid": insensitive, stupefied.[Return to reference 7](#)



- Note 8: Cugoano reminds the reader that he is still a child.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cugoano returns more explicitly to the question of African practices of enslavement: though these practices were often invoked in attempts to justify the European transatlantic system, he here sharply differentiates the two practices.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: After about two years in the West Indies, Cugoano was taken to England in 1772 by a man named earlier in the text as Alexander Campbell, who paid the price set by his former enslaver.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: God's superintending plan for and protection of the world.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Genesis 37:18–36, which describes how Joseph was sold by his half-brothers into slavery in Egypt.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Members of the House of Lords and the House of Commons.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Religious truth disclosed to the human intellect by reason and the contemplation of the created universe, in contrast to the religious truth revealed by God in the Bible.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: No matter how powerful he is during his mortal life.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See 2 Samuel 11–12: David, in love with Uriah's wife Bathsheba, sent instructions for Uriah to be sent to the front of a fierce battle and then abandoned, thus indirectly causing his death.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cugoano links several Bible verses, including Revelations 13:10, Proverbs 5:22, Proverbs 11:21, and Psalms 94:23.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Gravely guilty, reprehensible.[Return to reference 9](#)



## **SLAVERY IN POETRY**

## JAMES GRAINGER

James Grainger (1721?–1766)—a Scottish poet and medical doctor who spent years on sugar plantations in the Caribbean—wrote several seemingly conflicting things about slavery: he expressed pity for the plight of those enslaved, shared with enslavers his acquired wisdom about how to make the most profitable purchases of human beings, lamented he did not have the power to end slavery altogether, and (wrongly, self-interestedly) suggested that the lives of enslaved people in the Caribbean were really not so bad. Indeed, Grainger said all of these things in a single poem, *The Sugar-Cane* (1764)—a massive poem composed of four books and over 2,500 blank verse lines—and it is an ethical and historical question, how one person and one poem held together these ideas. The very form of his poem also involved him in another contradiction. *The Sugar-Cane* is a georgic poem, modeled after the ancient Latin poet Virgil's *Georgics*, which offered how-to farming advice in verse. Disturbingly, some of the language and ideas that Virgil used when discussing how to choose and treat livestock are here applied to enslaved people (a move that undercuts Grainger's explicit claim in the poem that it is wrong to treat enslaved people as "bestial," not human). Grainger was an "ameliorationist," meaning that he did not want to abolish slavery (as abolitionists did) but to "ameliorate," or improve, the living and working conditions of the enslaved. Grainger's wife was from a wealthy family that owned plantations in the Caribbean, and Grainger personally benefited from slavery on St. Christopher Island (or St. Kitts).

Many scholars understand Grainger's poem as a complex historical record of pro-imperial and proslavery thought in the eighteenth century; they reckon with its racism and try to understand its vision of slavery's place in the British Empire. With its detailed descriptions of nature and often quite scientifically precise footnotes about the island's flora and fauna (some of which are

reproduced here), the poem also offers a rich account of Caribbean islands in the eighteenth century. There is another way to read the poem, too. In *Digital Grainger*, a fascinating online edition of the whole poem, a collective of scholars led by Cristobal Silva, Julie Chun Kim, Kimberly Takahata, and Alex Gil have proposed, additionally, reading the poem “against the grain of Grainger’s pro-slavery narrative.” They suggest looking for what the poem shows, in spite of itself, about “the everyday lives of the enslaved and other marginalized subjects of the plantation.” For instance, they explain, the “provision grounds” that Grainger describes at the end of the selection here—lands set aside for enslaved people to grow their own food—might “be read as records of the resourcefulness and creativity of their cultivators, who dealt with the poor quality of lands they were given by learning to grow plants that others shunned.” While much early British abolitionist verse offers sentimental or general depictions of enslaved people, Grainger’s poem—almost unintentionally and often in uncomfortable, challenging language—might allow glimpses into Black lives on St. Kitts (and even hints of Black resistance amid horrifying circumstances).

## ***From The Sugar-Cane*<sup>1</sup>**

Genius of Africk!<sup>2</sup> whether thou bestrid'st<sup>o</sup>  
The castled elephant; or at the source,  
(While howls the desert fearfully around,)  
Of thine own Niger,<sup>3</sup> sadly thou reclin'st  
Thy temples shaded by the tremulous<sup>o</sup> palm,  
5 Or quick papaw,<sup>4</sup> whose top is necklaced round  
With numerous rows of party-colored<sup>o</sup> fruit:  
Or hear'st thou rather from the rocky banks  
Of Rio Grandê, or black Sanaga?<sup>5</sup>  
Where dauntless thou<sup>6</sup> the headlong torrent brav'st  
10 In search of gold, to brede<sup>o</sup> thy woolly locks,  
Or with bright ringlets ornament thine ears,  
Thine arms, and ankles: O attend my song.  
A muse that pities<sup>7</sup> thy distressful state;  
Who sees, with grief, thy sons in fetters bound;  
15 Who wishes freedom to the race of man;  
Thy nod assenting craves: dread Genius, come!  
  
Yet vain thy presence, vain thy favoring nod;  
Unless once more the muses, that erewhile  
Upheld me fainting in my past career,  
20 Through Caribbe's<sup>o</sup> cane-isles; kind condescend  
To guide my footsteps, through parched Libya's  
wilds;<sup>8</sup>  
And bind my sun-burnt brow with other bays,  
Than ever deck'd the Sylvan bard before.

\* \* \*

In mind, and aptitude for useful toil,

40 The negroes differ: muse that difference sing.<sup>9</sup>  
Whether to wield the hoe, or guide the plane;  
Or for domestic uses thou<sup>1</sup> intend'st  
The sunny Libyan: from what clime they spring,  
It not imports; if strength and youth be theirs.

45 Yet those from Congo's wide-extended plains,  
Through which the long Zaire<sup>o</sup> winds with crystal  
stream,  
Where lavish Nature sends indulgent forth  
Fruits of high flavor, and spontaneous seeds  
Of bland nutritious quality, ill bear  
The toilsome field; but boast a docile mind,  
And happiness of features. These, with care,  
50 Be taught each nice<sup>2</sup> mechanic art: or trained  
To household offices: their ductile souls  
Will all thy care, and all thy gold repay.

But, if the labors of the field demand  
Thy chief attention; and the ambrosial<sup>o</sup> cane shade  
55 Thou long'st to see, with spiry<sup>o</sup> frequency,<sup>o</sup>  
Many an acre: planter, choose the slave,  
Who sails from barren climes; where want alone,  
Offspring of rude necessity, compels  
The sturdy native, or to plant the soil,  
60 Or<sup>3</sup> stem vast rivers for his daily food.

Such are the children of the Golden Coast;  
Such the Papaws,<sup>4</sup> of negroes far the best:  
And such the numerous tribes, that skirt the shore,  
65 From rapid Volta to the distant Rey.<sup>5</sup>

But, planter, from what coast soe'er they sail,  
Buy not the old: they ever sullen prove;  
With heart-felt anguish, they lament their home;  
They will not, cannot work; they never learn

70 Thy native language; they are prone to ails;  
And oft by suicide their being end.—

Must thou from Africk reinforce thy gang?<sup>6</sup>—  
Let health and youth their every sinew firm;  
Clear roll their ample eye; their tongue be red;  
Broad swell their chest; their shoulders wide expand;  
75 Not prominent their belly; clean and strong  
Their thighs and legs, in just<sup>o</sup> proportion rise.  
Such soon will brave the fervors of the clime;  
And free from ails, that kill thy negroe-train,  
A useful servitude will long support.  
80

Yet, if thine own, thy children's life, be dear;  
Buy not a Cormantee,<sup>7</sup> though healthy, young.  
Of breed too generous<sup>o</sup> for the servile field;  
They, born to freedom in their native land,  
Choose death before dishonorable bonds:  
85 Or, fired with vengeance, at the midnight hour,  
Sudden they seize thine unsuspecting watch,  
And thine own poinard bury in thy breast.

\* \* \*

165 Nor, Negroe, at thy destiny repine,  
Though doomed to toil from dawn to setting sun.  
How far more pleasant is thy rural task,  
Than theirs who sweat, sequestered from the day,  
In dark tartarean caves, sunk far beneath  
The earth's dark surface;<sup>8</sup> where sulphureous  
170 flames,  
Oft from their vapory prisons bursting wild,  
To dire explosion give the caverned deep,  
And in dread ruin all its inmates whelm?<sup>o</sup>—  
Nor fateful only is the bursting flame;  
The exhalations of the deep-dug mine,  
175

Though slow, shake from their wings as sure a  
death.

With what intense severity of pain  
Hath the afflicted muse, in Scotia,<sup>o</sup> seen  
The miners racked, who toil for fatal lead?  
What cramps, what palsies shake their feeble limbs,  
180 Who, on the margin of the rocky Drave,<sup>9</sup>  
Trace silver's fluent<sup>o</sup> ore? Yet white men these!

How far more happy ye,<sup>1</sup> than those poor slaves,  
Who, whilom,<sup>o</sup> under native, gracious chiefs,  
185 Incas<sup>2</sup> and emperors, long time enjoyed  
Mild government, with every sweet of life,  
In blissful climates? See them dragged in chains,  
By proud insulting tyrants, to the mines  
Which once they called their own, and then  
despised!

See, in the mineral bosom of their land,  
190 How hard they toil! how soon their youthful limbs  
Feel the decrepitude of age! how soon  
Their teeth desert their sockets! and how soon  
Shaking paralysis unstrings their frame!  
Yet scarce, even then, are they allowed to view  
195 The glorious God of day, of whom they beg,  
With earnest hourly supplications, death;  
Yet death slow comes, to torture them the more!

With these compared, ye sons of Afric, say,  
200 How far more happy is your lot? Bland<sup>o</sup> health,  
Of ardent eye, and limb robust, attends  
Your custom'd<sup>o</sup> labor; and, should sickness seize,  
With what solicitude are ye not nursed!—  
Ye Negroes, then, your pleasing task pursue;  
And, by your toil, deserve your master's care.

205  
When first your Blacks are novel<sup>o</sup> to the hoe;

Study their humors:<sup>3</sup> Some, soft-soothing words;  
Some, presents; and some, menaces subdue;  
And some I've known, so stubborn is their kind,  
Whom blows, alas! could win alone to toil.

210

Yet, planter, let humanity prevail.—  
Perhaps thy Negroe, in his native land,  
Possessed large fertile plains, and slaves, and herds:  
Perhaps, whene'er he deigned to walk abroad,  
The richest silks, from where the Indus<sup>4</sup> rolls,  
215 His limbs invested<sup>o</sup> in their gorgeous pleats:  
Perhaps he wails his wife, his children, left  
To struggle with adversity: Perhaps  
Fortune, in battle for his country fought,  
Gave him a captive to his deadliest foe:  
220 Perhaps, incautious, in his native fields,  
(On pleasurable scenes his mind intent)  
All as he wandered; from the neighboring grove,  
Fell ambush dragged him to the hated main.<sup>o</sup>—  
Were they even sold for crimes; ye polished, say!  
225 Ye, to whom Learning opes her amplest page!  
Ye, whom the knowledge of a living God  
Should lead to virtue! Are ye free from crimes?  
Ah pity, then, these uninstructed swains;<sup>5</sup>  
And still let mercy soften the decrees  
230 Of rigid justice, with her lenient hand.

Oh, did the tender muse possess the power,  
Which monarchs have, and monarchs oft abuse:  
'Twould be the fond ambition of her soul,  
To quell tyrannic sway; knock off the chains  
235 Of heart-debasing slavery; give to man,  
Of every color and of every clime,  
Freedom, which stamps him image of his God.  
Then laws, Oppression's scourge,<sup>6</sup> fair Virtue's prop,



240 Offspring of Wisdom! should impartial reign,  
To knit the whole in well-accorded strife:  
Servants, not slaves; of choice, and not compelled;  
The Blacks should cultivate the Cane-land isles.

\* \* \*

'Til morning dawn, and Lucifer<sup>7</sup> withdraw  
His beamy<sup>o</sup> chariot; let not the loud bell  
Call forth thy negroes from their rushy couch:<sup>8</sup>  
And ere the sun with mid-day fervor glow,  
When every broom-bush<sup>9</sup> opes<sup>o</sup> her yellow flower;  
410 Let thy black laborers from their toil desist:  
Nor till the broom her every petal lock,  
Let the loud bell recall them to the hoe.  
But when the jalap<sup>1</sup> her bright tint displays,  
When the solanum<sup>2</sup> fills her cup with dew,  
415 And crickets, snakes, and lizards 'gin<sup>o</sup> their coil;  
Let them find shelter in their cane-thatched huts:  
Or, if constrained unusual hours to toil,  
(For even the best must sometimes urge their gang)  
With double nutriment reward their pains.

420  
Howe'er insensate<sup>3</sup> some may deem their slaves,  
Nor 'bove<sup>o</sup> the bestial rank; far other thoughts  
The muse, soft daughter of humanity!  
Will ever entertain.—The Ethiop<sup>4</sup> knows,  
The Ethiop feels, when treated like a man;  
425 Nor grudges, should necessity compel,  
By day, by night, to labor for his lord.

Not less inhuman, than unthrifty those;  
Who, half the year's rotation round the sun,  
Deny subsistence to their laboring slaves.  
430 But would'st thou see thy negroe-train increase,  
Free from disorders; and thine acres clad

With groves of sugar: every week dispense  
Or English beans, or Carolinian rice;  
Iërne's<sup>o</sup> beef, or Pensilvanian flour;  
435 Newfoundland cod, or herrings from the main  
That howls tempestuous round the Scotian isles!

Yet some there are so lazily inclined,  
And so neglectful of their food, that thou,  
Would'st thou preserve them from the jaws of death;  
440 Daily, their wholesome viands<sup>o</sup> must prepare:  
With these let all the young, and childless old,  
And all the morbid<sup>o</sup> share;—so heaven will bless,  
With manifold increase, thy costly care.

Suffice not this; to every slave assign  
445 Some mountain-ground: or, if waste broken land  
To thee belong, that broken land divide.  
This let them cultivate, one day, each week;  
And there raise yams, and there cassada's root:  
From a good daemon's staff cassada<sup>o</sup> sprang,  
450 Tradition says, and Caribbees believe;  
Which into three the white-robed genius broke,  
And bade them plant, their hunger to repel.<sup>5</sup>  
There let angola's<sup>6</sup> bloomy bush supply  
For many a year, with wholesome pulse their board.  
455 There let the bonavist,<sup>7</sup> his fringed pods  
Throw liberal o'er the prop; while ochra<sup>8</sup> bears  
Aloft his slimy pulp, and help disdains.  
There let potatoes<sup>o</sup> mantle o'er the ground;  
Sweet as the cane-juice is the root they bear.  
460 There too let eddas<sup>9</sup> spring in order meet,  
With Indian cale,<sup>1</sup> and foodful<sup>o</sup> calaloo:  
While mint, thyme, balm, and Europe's coyer herbs,  
Shoot gladsome forth, nor reprobate the clime.

## Endnotes

1764

- Note 1: These selections are from Book IV of the long poem, in which Grainger turns his attention from agricultural practices and the cultivation of sugar cane to the handling of an enslaved labor force.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A personification, the Spirit of Africa.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A major river in West Africa, running between what we today call Guinea and Nigeria.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Grainger has noted earlier that this tree's "botanical name is Papaya."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: What are today called the Koliba and Senegal Rivers—both also in West Africa.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: He still addresses the "Genius" of Africa.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The pitying comes from Grainger's muse, his source of poetic inspiration.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A conventional plea to the Muses who had sustained him thus far to continue to "guide" him for one final book of his poem.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Virgil's poem urges attention to differences in different soils, plants, and animals, suggesting the husbandman work with each specific thing's innate capabilities. Grainger problematically extends this georgic logic to humans, then lists stereotypes he associates with people from different parts of Africa.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Grainger addresses the "planter," the term he uses for the owner or overseer of the "plantation," the enslaver. This "planter" is not himself doing any planting.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Requiring scrupulous exactness" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: “Or . . . or” is a Latinism for “either . . . or”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: People from an area of West Africa around what is now Ghana and Benin.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Two more West African rivers (the Volta and Rio-del-Rey), in what are now called Ghana and Cameroon, respectively.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, acquire additional enslaved people from Africa.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A people, whom the British named after their Fort Kormantine in what is now Ghana, who were blamed by Europeans for inciting numerous rebellions of enslaved people in the Caribbean and North America in the 17th and 18th centuries.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Grainger addresses enslaved people, offering an ideologically loaded comparison of their plight to that of Scottish coal and lead miners. “Tartarean”: “hellish” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A river in Hungary, on whose banks are found mines of quicksilver [*Grainger’s note*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A Virgilian phrasing. See John Dryden’s 1697 translation of Virgil’s “happy husbandman”: “Oh happy, if he knew his state.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Indigenous peoples in South America. Grainger compares the plight of enslaved Africans in British colonial holdings to those enslaved by the Spanish. This is a version of the “Black Legend” that allowed British propagandists to argue they were humane, by comparison with the Spanish.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Grainger again addresses the “planter” with advice.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A river in Asia.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A conventional, poetic word for rural laborers, often used in georgic poetry.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: What will destroy Oppression.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The morning star.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Beds made from rushes (parts of a plant). Again Grainger addresses the White figures of power, offering advice about when to have their enslaved laborers begin a day of work.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: This small plant, which grows in every pasture, may, with propriety, be termed an American clock; for it begins every forenoon at eleven to open its yellow flowers, which about one are fully expanded, and at two closed [*from Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The jalap, or marvel of Peru, unfolds its petals between five and six in the evening, which shut again as soon as night comes on, to open again in the cool of the morning. This plant is called four o'clock by the natives, and bears either a yellow or purple-colored flower [*from Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: So some authors name the fire-weed, which grows everywhere. . . . It bears a white monopetalous flower, which opens always about sunset [*from Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Insensible, unfeeling.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Here representing all Africans.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: To an ancient Caribbean, bemoaning the savage uncomfortable life of his countrymen, a deity clad in white apparel appeared, and told him, he would have come sooner to have taught him the ways of civil life, had he been addressed before. He then showed him sharp-cutting stones to fell trees and build houses; and bade him cover them with the palm leaves. Then he broke his staff in three; which, being planted, soon after produced cassada. See Ogilby's *America* (1671) [*Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Pigeon pea's.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: This is the Spanish name of a plant, which produces an excellent bean [*Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Or Ockro [okra]. This shrub, which will last for years, produces a not less agreeable, than wholesome pod. It bears all the year round. Being of a slimy and balsamic nature, it

becomes a truly medicinal aliment in dysenteric complaints  
[*from Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: The French call this plant Tayove. It produces eatable roots every four months, for one year only [*from Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: This green, which is a native of the New World, equals any of the greens in the Old [*Grainger's note*].[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *ride*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *quivering*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *multicolored*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *braid*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the Caribbean's*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the Congo River*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fragrant*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pointy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crowdedness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *proper*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *noble*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bury*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Scotland*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *flowing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *once*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mild, soothing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *accustomed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *new*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clothed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *ocean*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *full of beams*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *opens*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *begin*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *above*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *Ireland's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *foods*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sickly*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *cassava*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *sweet potatoes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *plentiful*[Return to reference](#) °

## WILLIAM SHENSTONE

Among the twenty-six elegies included in the *Works in Verse and Prose* (2 volumes, 1764) by the British writer and garden designer William Shenstone (1714–1763) is one that adopts the voice of an enslaved African, whose sufferings Shenstone considers alongside his own. As a group, Shenstone's elegies treat his personal life, his melancholy, and his unrequited love for a woman he calls Delia. It was common in poetry to dramatize the pains of love: using an ancient poetic idiom, male poets often declared themselves the "slaves" of the women on whom they fixated. But Shenstone's Elegy XX does something markedly different. He begins by acknowledging that his sufferings are insignificant and even pleasing compared to the plight of those subject to enslavement. In lofty, heroic language, he imagines the voice of an African cruelly victimized by European Christians, who hypocritically speak to him of goodness and heaven. The poem's antislavery themes so far exceeded its original context—Shenstone's melancholic account of his own life—that the famous British abolitionist Granville Sharp included it in two of his antislavery tracts, *An Essay on Slavery* (1773) and *The Just Limitations of Slavery in the Laws of God* (1776), with the first four stanzas lopped off, under the title "An Elegy on the Miserable State of an African Slave." Throughout the poem, Shenstone subtly acknowledges the distances between his own poetic language and the actual experiences and feelings of the African whom he and other Britons endeavor to imagine sympathetically.



## Elegy XX

***He compares his humble fortune with the distress of others;  
and his subjection to Delia, with the miserable servitude of  
an African slave.<sup>1</sup>***

Why droops his heart, with fancied<sup>o</sup> woes forlorn?  
Why sinks my soul beneath each wintry sky?  
What pensive crowds, by ceaseless labors worn,  
What myriads, wish to be as blest as I!

5      What though my roofs devoid of pomp<sup>o</sup> arise,  
Nor tempt the proud to quit his destined way?  
Nor costly art my flowery dales disguise.<sup>2</sup>  
Where only simple friendship deigns to stray?

10     See the wild sons of Lapland's chill domain,<sup>3</sup>  
That scoop their couch<sup>o</sup> beneath the drifted snows!  
How void of hope they ken<sup>o</sup> the frozen plains,  
Where the sharp east<sup>o</sup> forever, ever blows!

15     Slave though I be, to Delia's eyes a slave,  
My Delia's eyes endear the bands<sup>o</sup> I wear;  
The sigh she causes well becomes the brave.  
The pang she causes, 'tis even bliss to bear.

20     See the poor native quit the Lybian shores,<sup>4</sup>  
Ah! not in love's delightful fetters bound!  
No radiant smile his dying peace restores,  
Nor love, nor fame, nor friendship heals his wound.

Let vacant bards<sup>o</sup> display their boasted woes,  
Shall I the mockery of grief display?

No, let the muse his<sup>o</sup> piercing pangs disclose,  
Who bleeds and weeps his sum of life away!

25 On the wild beach in mournful guise he stood,  
Ere the shrill boatswain<sup>5</sup> gave the hated sign;  
He dropt a tear unseen into the flood;<sup>o</sup>  
He stole one secret moment, to repine,

Yet the muse listened to the complaints he made;  
Such moving complaints as nature could inspire;  
30 To me the muse his tender plea conveyed,  
But smoothed, and suited to the sounding lyre.<sup>o</sup>

“Why am I ravished<sup>6</sup> from my native strand?<sup>o</sup>  
What savage race protects this impious gain?  
Shall foreign plagues infest this teeming land,  
35 And more than sea-born monsters plough the main?  
<sup>o</sup>

Here the dire locusts horrid swarms prevail;  
Here the blue asps with livid poison swell;  
Here the dry dipsas<sup>7</sup> writhes his sinuous mail;  
40 Can we not here, secure from envy, dwell?<sup>8</sup>

When the grim lion urged his cruel chase,  
When the stern panther sought his midnight prey,  
What fate reserved me for this Christian race?  
O race more polished, more severe than they!

45 Ye prowling wolves pursue my latest cries!  
Thou hungry tiger, leave thy reeking den!  
Ye sandy wastes in rapid eddies rise!  
O tear me from the whips and scorns of men!

Yet in their face superior beauty glows;  
Are smiles the mien<sup>o</sup> of rapine and of wrong?  
50

Yet from their lip the voice of mercy flows,  
And even religion dwells upon their tongue.

Of blissful haunts<sup>o</sup> they tell, and brighter climes,<sup>o</sup>  
Where gentle minds conveyed by death repair,<sup>9</sup>  
55 But stained with blood, and crimsoned o'er with  
crimes,  
Say, shall they merit what they paint<sup>o</sup> so fair?

No, careless, hopeless of those fertile plains,  
Rich by our toils, and by our sorrows gay,  
They ply our labors, and enhance our pains,  
60 And feign these distant regions to repay.<sup>1</sup>

For them our tusked elephant expires;  
For them we drain the mine's embowelled gold;  
Where rove the brutal nations' wild desires?—  
Our limbs are purchased, and our life is sold!

65 Yet shores there are, blest shores for us remain,  
And favored isles with golden fruitage crowned,  
Where tufted flowerets paint the verdant plain,  
Where every breeze shall med'cine<sup>o</sup> every wound.

There the stern tyrant that embitters life  
70 Shall, vainly suppliant, spread his asking hand;  
There shall we view the billow's raging strife,  
Aid the kind breast, and waft his boat to land."

## Endnotes

1764

- Note 1: All of Shenstone's numbered elegies are introduced with these brief descriptions, called "arguments," of the contents of the following poems. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Shenstone, a thoughtful and influential gardener, devoted much of his comparatively narrow resources to

beautifying his often-visited estate, the Leasowes.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Now called Sápmi, the land of the Sámi people in the far north of Europe. (The English name “Lapland” is now avoided because the term “Lapp” for the Sámi is understood to be pejorative.)[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Though Libya, a country of North Africa, was mostly unaffected by European trafficking in enslaved people, Shenstone uses the term *Lybian* poetically to stand for all Africa.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Poetic name for the pilot of a ship transporting enslaved people.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Taken by force.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A snake often mentioned in ancient Greek literature whose bite is said to cause thirst.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See *Paradise Lost* 1.259–60, where Satan says of Hell: “th’Almighty hath not built / Here for his envy, will not drive us hence.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Resort to for comfort and healing.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: And pretend to live in a way that pays the price demanded by heaven to enter it.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *imagined*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *showy wealth*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shelter, place of rest*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *view*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *east wind*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fetters*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vacuous poets*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the African’s*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *tide*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *poet’s harp*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *shore*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *open ocean*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *facial expression*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heaven* [Return to reference](#) °
- °: *climates*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *portray*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *heal*[Return to reference](#) °

## JUPITER HAMMON

Among the founders of Black American literature, Jupiter Hammon (1711–ca. 1806) was born enslaved to the Lloyd family on Long Island, New York. The circumstances under which he learned to read and write are not established, though it is possible he was taught at a schoolhouse along with the Lloyd children. His first published literary work, the poem “An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries” (1761), was written when he was nearly fifty, in 1760, and it stands as the first published poem by a Black North American poet. Some eighteen years later, he published the poem “An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley” (1778), which praises and encourages the younger Black poet’s Christian piety. Such themes prevail throughout his work, as he promotes the acceptance of God’s will and gratitude for Christ’s salvation. Among his most well-known pieces is his prose *An Address to Negroes in the State of New York*, a speech he gave in 1786, when he was seventy-one years old, to the African Society, the first Black social and political organization in New York City. While still stressing a message of obedience and salvation, the speech also affirms that “liberty is a great thing,” and says he wishes that “the young negroes were to be free.” (At his age, he felt that leaving the home in which he had lived his life enslaved and attempting to compete in the “free” labor market would only expose him to utter destitution.) He concludes by placing his hope in heaven, “where we shall find nobody to reproach us for being Black, or for being slaves.”

Dating to the same year as *An Address*, Hammon’s poem “An Essay on Slavery” was unpublished in his lifetime. It adopts many of the speech’s themes, with a more striking insistence that slavery is an evil and that liberty is the human destiny of Black people. The poem, in Hammon’s own hand, was located in a Yale University library by the scholar Julie McCown, and she and another scholar, Cedrick May, analyzed and published it in 2013. The poem

complicates the previously common view of Hammon as merely compliant and uninterested in contesting enslavement. McCown and May argue that Hammon likely intended to publish it alongside *An Address*, and persuasively speculate that elements of its message might have been too inflammatory for the Lloyd family to allow it into print. The edition by McCown and May (which is reproduced here, with notes abridged) meticulously records evidence of Hammon's revisions to the manuscript: final wordings, marked in the main text below with asterisks, can be compared to initial wordings marked with asterisks in the right margins. As McCown and May point out, some of these final revisions more decisively place the moral blame for slavery on "Man," not on God or the nature of things, and imply that it is the duty of humanity to replace slavery with liberty. The text below preserves the idiosyncrasies of Hammon's handwriting, spelling, and style—notably clean and consistent by eighteenth-century manuscript standards—while indicating a carefully revised, largely finished production.

# **An Essay on Slavery, with submission to Divine providence, knowing that God Rules over all things—**

***Written by Jupiter Hammon—***

## **1**

Our forefathers came from Africa  
tost over the raging main  
to a Christian shore there for to stay  
and not return again.

## **2**

5 Dark and dismal was the Day  
When slavery began  
All humble thoughts were put away  
Then slaves were made \*by Man.

## **3**

10 When God doth please for to permit  
That slavery should be  
It is our duty to submit  
Till Christ shall \*make us free

## **4**

Come let us join with one consent  
With humble hearts \*and say  
For every sin we must repent



15 And walk in wisdoms way.

## 5

If we are free \*we'll pray to God  
If we are slaves the same  
\*It's firmly fixt in \*\*his word.  
20 Ye shall not pray in vain.

## 6

Come blessed Jesus in thy Love  
And hear thy Children cry  
And send them smiles now from above  
And grant them Liberty.

## 7

25 Tis thou alone can make us free  
We are thy subjects two<sup>1</sup>  
Pray give us grace to bend a knee  
The time we stay below.

## 8

30 This unto thee we look for all  
Thou art our only King  
Thou hast the power to save the soul  
And bring us flocking in.

## 9

We come as sinners \*unto thee  
We know thou hast the word  
Come blessed Jesus make us free

35 And bring us to our God.

## 10

Although we are in slavery-  
We will pray unto our God  
He hath mercy ~~hid~~<sup>2</sup> beyond the sky  
40 Tis in his holy word.

## 11

Come unto me ye humble souls  
Although you live in strife  
I keep alive, \*I save the soul  
And give eternal life.

## 12

45 To all that do repent of sin  
\*Be they ~~there~~<sup>3</sup> bond or free.  
I am their savior and their king  
They must come unto me.

## 13

50 Hear the words \*now of the Lord  
The call is loud and certain  
We must be judged by his word  
Without respect of person.<sup>4</sup>

## 14

55 Come let us seek his precepts now  
And love his holy word  
With humble soul we'll surely bow

And wait the great reward.

## 15

Although we came from Africa  
We look unto our God  
To help with our hearts to sigh and pray  
And Love his holy word.

## 16

Although we are in slavery  
Bound \*by the yoke of Man  
We must always have a single Eye  
And do the best we can.

## 17

Come let us join with humble voice  
Now on the christian shore  
If we will have our only choice  
Tis Slavery no more.

## 18

Now [~~surely~~ surely] let us not repine  
And say his wheels are slow<sup>5</sup>  
He can fill our hearts with things divine  
And give us freedom two.

## 19

He hath the power all in his hand  
And all he doth is right  
And if we are tide to ~~the~~ yoke of man

\*We'll pray with all our might.

## 20

80 This the State of thousands now  
Who are on the christian shore  
Forget the Lord to whom we bow  
And think of him no more.

## 21

85 When shall we hear the joyfull sound  
Echo the christian shore  
Each humble voice with songs resound  
That Slavery is no more.

## 22

Then shall we rejoice and sing  
Loud praises to our God  
Come sweet Jesus heavenly king  
Thou art the son \*Our Lord.

## 23

90 We are thy children blessed Lord  
Tho still in Slavery  
\*We'll seek thy precepts Love thy word  
Untill the day we Die.

## 24

95 Come blessed Jesus hear us now  
And teach our hearts to pray  
And seek the Lord to whom we Bow

Before tribunal day.

## 25

100      Now Glory be unto our God  
All praise be justly given  
Come seek his precepts Love his works  
That is the way to Heaven.—

---

Composed By Jupiter Hammon  
A Negro Man belonging to Mr John Lloyd  
Queens-Village on Long Island—

November 10th 1786

## Endnotes

- Note 1: A word Hammon misspells, or miswrites, twice in the manuscript (see also line 73).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Here the manuscript strikes out the word “hid” without replacing it.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Ephesians 6:8.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Without considering a person’s social status.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Hammon alludes to the proverb, “the wheels (or mills) of God’s judgment grind exceedingly slow, but exceedingly fine”: that is, divine justice, though seemingly delayed, will result in all people receiving precisely what they deserve.[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- \*: to [Return to reference \\*](#)

- \*: *come again*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *to*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *we will*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *It is*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *his holy*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *up to*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *and*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *Whether*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *of*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *to*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *We must pray through day and night.*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *of God*[Return to reference \\*](#)
- \*: *We*[Return to reference \\*](#)

## HANNAH MORE

The author, educator, and philanthropist Hannah More (1745–1833) led a life crowded with literary successes, and with causes: she wrote and worked to reform the aristocracy, educate the poor, and establish “modern” methods to educate women as well, with an eye toward equipping them to fulfill the social roles their gender enjoined on them. Her intellect and passions were particularly strongly engaged by the movement to end the British trade in enslaved people, which gained adherents and fervor in Britain in the late 1780s. In 1787, she met William Wilberforce, the chief parliamentary campaigner for abolition, and published *Slavery, a Poem* early in 1788 to support the first bill to end the trade that would be promoted by Wilberforce and his allies. The bill’s failure in 1789 only invigorated More to work harder for the cause. When Parliament at last banned the British trade in 1807, she joined the newly formed African Institution, which sought to establish a refuge for freed Black people in Sierra Leone, in West Africa; and worked in subsequent decades to rid the British colonies of slavery itself, a task finally accomplished by the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, a few months before her death.

More’s poem *Slavery* orchestrates many contrasting energies. She insists on the mass scale of the moral catastrophe of slavery, differentiating herself from earlier writers such as Aphra Behn and Thomas Southerne, who focused on the injustice of enslaving singularly exalted individuals like Oroonoko and Imoinda (see [p. 152](#)). But she also tells the story of Quashi, a noble African enslaved in the West Indies whom she learned about from her friend, the abolitionist minister James Ramsay; and her poem includes sentimental vignettes that visualize an African husband torn from his wife and infant, and address a murdering slaver on the brink of his crime. Further complexities emerge from her sympathetic yet stereotyped, generalizing views of Africans’ “rude energy” and

"strong but luxuriant virtues." More weaves a somewhat confused language of otherness to portray Africans alongside social groups with whom she and her readers were more familiar. Like heroes of Roman antiquity, Africans are noble "pagans," that is, non-Christians. But More also repeatedly refers to Africans as "savages," implicitly distinguishing them from "civilized" ancient Romans, as well as from modern Europeans. She nevertheless also casts European enslavers as "barbarians," perhaps alluding to the hordes from northern Europe who wrecked the civilization of Rome. Finally all these frail distinctions break down in the poem's concluding section: at a dramatic moment of reversal, she addresses the "WHITE SAVAGE!" (line 211) who perpetrates the abductions, murders, and expropriations of European colonialism. The poem comes to rest with the descent of angelic Mercy, a universalizing Christian influence sent to all peoples from heaven.



## ***From Slavery, a Poem***

\* \* \*

Though not to me, sweet bard,<sup>1</sup> thy powers  
belong,  
50 Fair truth, a hallowed guide! inspires my song.  
Here art would weave her gayest flowers in vain,  
For truth the bright invention would disdain.  
For no fictitious ills these numbers<sup>o</sup> flow,  
But living anguish, and substantial woe;  
55 No individual griefs my bosom melt,  
For millions feel what Oroonoko felt:  
Fired by no single wrongs, the countless host  
I mourn, by rapine dragged from Afric's coast.  
Perish th'illiberal thought which would debase  
60 The native genius of the sable race!  
Perish the proud philosophy, which sought  
To rob them of the powers of equal thought!  
Does then th'immortal principle within  
Change with the casual<sup>o</sup> color of a skin?  
Does matter govern spirit? or is mind  
65 Degraded by the form to which 'tis joined?  
No: they have heads to think, and hearts to feel,  
And souls to act, with firm, though erring, zeal;  
For they have keen affections, kind desires,  
70 Love strong as death, and active patriot fires;<sup>o</sup>  
All the rude energy, the fervid flame,  
Of high-souled passion, and ingenuous shame:  
Strong but luxuriant<sup>o</sup> virtues boldly shoot  
From the wild vigor of a savage root.  
Nor weak their sense of honor's proud control,  
75 For pride is virtue in a pagan<sup>2</sup> soul;

A sense of worth, a conscience<sup>o</sup> of desert,  
A high, unbroken haughtiness of heart:  
That self-same stuff which erst<sup>o</sup> proud empires  
    swayed,  
Of which the conquerors of the world were made.  
80 Capricious fate of man! that very pride  
In Afric scourged, in Rome was deified.  
    No Muse, O Quashi!<sup>3</sup> shall thy deeds relate,  
No statue snatch thee from oblivious<sup>o</sup> fate!  
For thou wast born where never gentle muse  
85 On valor's grave the flowers of genius strews;  
And thou wast born where no recording page  
Plucks the fair deed from time's devouring rage.  
Had fortune placed thee on some happier coast,  
Where polished souls heroic virtue boast,  
90 To thee, who sought'st a voluntary grave,  
Th'uninjur'd honors of thy name to save,  
Whose generous arm thy barbarous master spared,  
Altars had smoked, and temples had been reared.<sup>4</sup>  
    Whene'er to Afric's shores I turn my eyes,  
95 Horrors of deepest, deadliest guilt arise;  
I see, by more than fancy's mirror<sup>o</sup> shown,  
The burning village, and the blazing town:  
See the dire victim torn from social life,  
The shrieking babe, the agonizing wife!  
100 She, wretch forlorn! is dragged by hostile hands,  
To distant tyrants sold, in distant lands!  
Transmitted miseries, and successive chains,  
The sole sad heritage her child obtains!  
Ev'n this last wretched boon their foes deny,  
105 To weep together, or together die.  
By felon hands, by one relentless stroke,  
See the fond links of feeling nature broke!  
The fibers twisting round a parent's heart,  
Torn from their grasp, and bleeding as they part.  
110

Hold, murderers, hold! not aggravate distress;  
Respect the passions you yourselves possess;  
Ev'n you, of ruffian heart, and ruthless hand,  
Love your own offspring, love your native land.  
115 Ah! leave them holy freedom's cheering smile,  
The heaven-taught fondness for the parent soil;  
Revere affections mingled with our frame,<sup>o</sup>  
In every nature, every clime the same;  
In all, these feelings equal sway maintain;  
In all the love of HOME and FREEDOM reign:  
120 And Tempe's vale, and parched Angola's sand,<sup>5</sup>  
One equal fondness of their sons command.  
Th'unconquer'd savage laughs at pain and toil,  
Basking in freedom's beams which gild his native  
soil.

Does thirst of empire, does desire of fame,  
125 (For these are specious crimes)<sup>6</sup> our rage inflame?  
No: sordid lust of gold their fate controls,  
The basest appetite of basest souls;  
Gold, better gained by what their ripening sky,<sup>7</sup>  
Their fertile fields, their arts<sup>8</sup> and mines supply.

130 What wrongs, what injuries does oppression  
plead  
To smooth the horror of th'unnatural deed?  
What strange offence, what aggravated sin?  
They stand convicted—of a darker skin!  
Barbarians, hold! th'opprobrious commerce spare,  
135 Respect *his*<sup>o</sup> sacred image which they bear:  
Though dark and savage, ignorant and blind,  
They claim the common privilege of kind;<sup>o</sup>  
Let malice strip them of each other plea,  
They still are men, and men should still be free.  
140 Insulted reason loathes th'inverted trade—  
Dire change! the agent is the purchase made!<sup>9</sup>  
Perplexed, the baffled muse involves<sup>o</sup> the tale;

145 Nature confounded, well may language fail!  
The outraged goddess with abhorrent eyes  
Sees MAN the traffic, SOULS the merchandize!

\* \* \*

And thou, WHITE SAVAGE! whether lust of gold,  
Or lust of conquest, rule thee uncontrolled!  
Hero, or robber!—by whatever name  
Thou plead thy impious claim to wealth or fame;  
Whether inferior mischiefs<sup>1</sup> be thy boast,  
215 A petty tyrant rifling Gambia's coast:  
Or bolder carnage track thy crimson way,  
Kings dispossessed, and provinces thy prey;  
Panting to tame wide earth's remotest bound;  
All Cortez murdered, all Columbus found;<sup>2</sup>  
220 O'er plundered realms to reign, detested Lord,  
Make millions wretched, and thyself abhorred;—  
In reason's eye, in wisdom's fair account,  
Your sum of glory boasts a like amount;  
The means may differ, but the end's the same;  
225 Conquest is pillage with a nobler name.  
Who makes the sum of human blessings less,  
Or sinks the stock of general happiness,  
No solid fame shall grace, no true renown,  
His life shall blazon,<sup>o</sup> or his memory crown.  
230 Had those advenferous spirits who explore  
Through ocean's trackless wastes, the far-sought  
shore;  
Whether of wealth insatiate, or of power,  
Conquerors who waste, or ruffians who devour:  
Had these possessed, O Cook!<sup>3</sup> thy gentle mind,  
235 Thy love of arts, thy love of humankind;  
Had these pursued thy mild and liberal plan,  
DISCOVERERS had not been a curse to man!

\* \* \*

Shall Britain, where the soul of freedom reigns,  
Forge chains for others she herself disdains?  
Forbid it, Heaven! O let the nations know  
The liberty she loves she will bestow;  
255 Not to herself the glorious gift confined,  
She spreads the blessing wide as humankind;  
And, scorning narrow views of time and place,  
Bids all be free in earth's extended space.  
What page of human annals can record  
A deed so bright as human rights restored?  
260 O may that god-like deed, that shining page,  
Redeem OUR fame, and consecrate OUR age!  
And see, the cherub Mercy from above,  
Descending softly, quits the sphere of love!  
On feeling hearts she sheds celestial dew,  
265 And breathes her spirit o'er th'enlighten'd few;  
From soul to soul the spreading influence steals,  
Till every breast the soft contagion feels.  
She bears, exulting, to the burning shore  
The loveliest office o angel ever bore;  
270 To vindicate the power in Heaven adored,  
To still the clank of chains, and sheathe the sword;  
To cheer the mourner, and with soothing hands  
From bursting hearts unbind th'oppressor's bands;  
To raise the luster of the Christian name,  
275 And clear the foulest blot that dims its fame.  
As the mild spirit hovers o'er the coast,  
A fresher hue the withered landscapes boast;  
Her healing smiles the ruined scenes repair,  
And blasted nature wears a joyous air.  
280 She spreads her blest commission from above,  
Stamped with the sacred characters of love;  
She tears the banner stained with blood and tears,  
And, LIBERTY! thy shining standard rears!

285 As the bright ensign's<sup>o</sup> glory she displays,  
See pale OPPRESSION faints beneath the blaze!  
The giant dies! no more his frown appalls,  
The chain untouched, drops off; the fetter falls.  
Astonished echo tells the vocal shore,  
Oppression's fallen, and slavery is no more!  
290 The dusky myriads<sup>o</sup> crowd the sultry plain,  
And hail that mercy long invoked in vain.  
Victorious power! she bursts their two-fold bands,  
And FAITH and FREEDOM spring from Mercy's hands.

## Endnotes

1788

- Note 1: More has just addressed Thomas Southerne in lines not included here ("plaintive Southerne!" 37), the Irish dramatist who adapted *Oroonoko* (1688) by Aphra Behn for the stage, as *Oroonoko, a Tragedy* (1696): as in Behn's story, the title character is a noble African prince whose resistance to enslavement ends in his death.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Non-Christian, "heathen," but also a term Europeans commonly applied to people they did not consider civilized.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
It is a point of honor among negroes of a high spirit to die rather than to suffer their glossy skin to bear the mark of the whip. Qua-shi had somehow offended his master, a young planter with whom he had been bred up in the endearing intimacy of a play-fellow. His services had been faithful; his attachment affectionate. The master resolved to punish him, and pursued him for that purpose. In trying to escape Qua-shi stumbled and fell; the master fell upon him; they wrestled long with doubtful victory; at length Qua-shi got uppermost, and, being firmly seated on his master's breast, he secured his legs with one hand, and with the other drew a sharp knife; then

said, 'Master, I have been bred up with you from a child; I have loved you as myself: in return, you have condemned me to a punishment of which I must ever have borne the marks: thus only can I avoid them'; so saying, he drew the knife with all his strength across his own throat, and fell down dead, without a groan, on his master's body. Ramsay's *Essay on the Treatment of African Slaves* [More's note]. More condenses and freely paraphrases an anecdote related in James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (1784), [pp. 249–53](#). Ramsay, a surgeon and Anglican minister who worked on St. Kitts in the Caribbean, offers firsthand accounts of Quashi and many other enslaved people to illustrate both the inherent nobility of Africans and their need to be converted to Christianity (which forbids suicide).

[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: In contemplating the honors Quashi would have received had his deed be done in a more celebrated place and time such as ancient Rome, More again reminds us that the code of honorable suicide that he shares with Roman heroes is non-Christian. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Namib desert extends along the coast of Angola in southwestern Africa. "Tempe's vale": at the foot of Mount Olympus, the Vale of Tempe figures prominently in ancient Greek stories of the gods. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: More has no objection to imperial ambitions and the love of fame, but will go on to say that the trade in enslaved people is driven not by those noble impulses but by a true (not merely "specious") crime, the "sordid lust of gold" (line 127). [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: It was commonly or fancifully believed that the heat of the sun "ripens" precious metals in the earth. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Besides many valuable productions of the soil, cloths and carpets of exquisite manufacture are brought from the coast of Guinea [More's note]. [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Human beings, normally the “agents” who make commercial transactions, are themselves made commodities in human trafficking.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Deeds excused as merely small-scale crimes.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: More compares the scale of the crimes of Britain in Africa to the extent of the Western Hemisphere as Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) found it in 1492. “Cortez”: Hernán Cortéz (1485–1547), Spanish conqueror of the Aztec Empire.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: James Cook (1728–1779), captain in the Royal Navy, cartographer, and explorer of the South Pacific, whom Britons of More’s time often celebrated as a humane explorer (see Anna Seward, “An Elegy on Captain Cook,” p. 348), but whose legacy as a promoter of British colonialism has recently been more critically assessed.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *verses*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nonessential*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *passions*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *profuse*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *consciousness*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *in the past*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *forgetful*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *imagination*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *physical constitution*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *God’s*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the human species*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *confusedly entangles*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *glorify*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *function, duty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *insignia’s*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Africans*[Return to reference °](#)



## JAMES BOSWELL

The Scottish biographer, diarist, and lawyer James Boswell initially seemed inclined against slavery, working on the legal team that supported the appeal of Joseph Knight, an enslaved man in Scotland who first sued for his freedom in 1774, and soliciting an abolitionist argument to support Knight's case in 1777 from his friend Samuel Johnson (see above). Boswell also attended a meeting of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787. But by the time he published his masterpiece, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791; see [p. 884](#)), his position had shifted. In the *Life*, he consistently worked, scholars have pointed out, to mute the vigorous antislavery sentiments of his literary hero. The same year the *Life* appeared, Boswell also anonymously published *No Abolition of Slavery, or the Universal Empire of Love*, a lampoon of the leading parliamentary abolitionists that also rehearses familiar arguments made by slavery's apologists: he claims that Africans are happy to be enslaved on British plantations, that the promoters of ending the transatlantic trade do not understand how deleterious to British commerce such a ban would be, that God intends society to be a hierarchy in which some groups must be subordinated to others, and so on. He concludes with the most bizarre point of all, seemingly made, after a fashion, in jest. Love holds ultimate power over everybody, Boswell muses, making all men its slaves, and stopping Britain's transatlantic system of chattel slavery would have no effect on this universal "slavery" of the romantic kind. The poem facetiously advances this idea as a compliment to the unnamed young woman it addresses, evoking offhand the sufferings of the Middle Passage and the often fatal "seasoning" of enslaved Africans in British Caribbean colonies to illustrate Boswell's own pangs of love. His analogy suggests how easily some White Britons of the era could minimize or connive at the painful realities of enslavement

when they were invested, financially, ideologically, or otherwise, in its continuance.

# ***From No Abolition of Slavery; or, The Universal Empire of Love***

\* \* \*

Noodles,<sup>1</sup> who rave for abolition  
Of *th'African's improved condition*,<sup>2</sup>  
At your own cost fine projects try;  
Don't *rob*—from *pure humanity*.

25     Go, W—, with narrow skull,  
Go home, and preach away at Hull,<sup>3</sup>  
No longer to the senate<sup>4</sup> cackle,  
In strains which suit the tabernacle;<sup>o</sup>  
I hate your little witling<sup>o</sup> sneer,  
Your pert and self-sufficient leer,  
30     Mischief to trade sits on thy lip,  
Insects will gnaw the noblest ship;  
Go, W—, be gone, for shame,  
Thou dwarf,<sup>5</sup> with a big-sounding name.

\* \* \*

55     What frenzies will a rabble seize  
In lax luxurious days, like these;  
THE PEOPLE'S MAJESTY, forsooth,  
Must fix our rights, define our truth;  
Weavers<sup>6</sup> become our lords of trade,  
And every clown throw<sup>7</sup> by his spade,  
60     T'*instruct* our ministers of state,  
And *foreign commerce* regulate:  
Ev'n *bony* Scotland with her dirk,<sup>8</sup>  
Nay, her starved Presbyterian *kirk*,<sup>9</sup>

65 With ignorant effrontery prays  
Britain to dim the western rays,<sup>1</sup>  
Which while they on our island fall  
Give warmth and splendor to us all.

\* \* \*

180 He who to thwart GOD'S system<sup>2</sup> tries,  
Bids mountains sink, and valleys rise;  
Slavery, subjection, what you will,  
Has ever been, and will be still:  
Trust me, that in this world of woe  
Mankind must different burthens know;  
185 Each bear his own, th'apostle spoke;<sup>3</sup>  
And chiefly they who bear the yoke.<sup>4</sup>  
From wise subordination's plan  
Springs the chief happiness of man;  
Yet from that source to numbers flow  
Varieties of pain and woe;  
190 Look round this land of freedom, pray,  
And all its lower ranks survey;  
Bid the hard-working laborer speak,  
What are his scanty gains a week?  
All huddled in a smoky shed,  
195 How are his wife and children fed?  
Are not the poor in constant fear  
Of the relentless overseer?<sup>5</sup>

LONDON! Metropolis of bliss!  
200 Ev'n there sad sights we cannot miss;  
Beggars at every corner stand,  
With doleful look and trembling hand;  
Hear the shrill piteous cry of *sweep*,  
See wretches riddling<sup>o</sup> an ash heap;  
The streets some for old iron scrape,  
205 And scarce the crush of wheels escape;

Some share with dogs the half-eat bones,  
From dunghills picked with weary groans.

\* \* \*

Lo then, in yonder fragrant isle  
Where nature ever seems to smile,  
The cheerful gang!<sup>6</sup>—the negroes see  
Perform the task of industry:  
245 Ev'n at their labor hear them sing,  
While time flies quick on downy wing;  
Finished the business of the day,  
No human beings are more gay:  
Of food, clothes, cleanly lodging sure,  
250 Each has his property secure;  
Their wives and children are protected,  
In sickness they are not neglected;  
And when old age brings a release,  
Their grateful days they end in peace.  
  
255 But should our wrongheads have their will,  
Should Parliament approve their bill,  
Pernicious as th'effect would be,  
T'abolish negro slavery,  
Such partial freedom would be vain,  
260 Since love's strong empire must remain.  
  
VENUS, czarina<sup>o</sup> of the skies,  
Despotic by her killing eyes,  
Millions of slaves who don't complain,  
Confess her universal reign:  
265 And Cupid too well-used to try  
His bow-string lash, and darts to ply,  
Her little *Driver* still we find,  
A wicked rogue, although he's blind.<sup>7</sup>

Bring me not maxims from the schools;<sup>o</sup>

270 Experience now my conduct rules;  
O ——! trust thy lover true,  
I must and will be slave to you.<sup>8</sup>

Yet I must say—but prithee smile,—  
'Twas a hard trip to Paphos<sup>9</sup> isle;  
By your keen roving glances caught,  
275 And to a beauteous tyrant brought;  
My head with giddiness turned round,  
With strongest fetters I was bound;  
I fancy from my frame and face,  
You thought me of th'Angola race:<sup>1</sup>  
280 You kept me long indeed, my dear,  
Between the decks of hope and fear;  
But this and all the *seasoning*<sup>2</sup> o'er,  
My blessings I enjoy the more.

285 Contented with my situation,  
I want but little REGULATION;  
At intervals *chanson à boire*  
And good old port in my *Code noire*;<sup>3</sup>  
Nor care I when I've once begun,  
How long I labor, in the sun  
290 Of your bright eyes!—which beam with joy,  
Warm, cheer, enchant, but don't destroy.

My charming friend! it is full time  
To close this argument in rhyme;  
The rhapsody must now be ended,  
295 My proposition I've defended;  
For, slavery there must ever be,  
While we have mistresses like thee!

- Note 1: If the abettors of the Slave trade Bill should think they are too harshly treated in this Poem, let them consider how they should feel if *their* estates were threatened by an agrarian law; (no unpalatable measure) and let them make allowances for the irritation which themselves have occasioned [*Boswell's note*].  
"Noodles": fools.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That the Africans are in a state of savage wretchedness, appears from the most authentic accounts. Such being the fact, an abolition of the slave trade would in truth be precluding them from the first step towards progressive civilization, and consequently of happiness, which it is proved by the most respectable evidence they enjoy in a great degree in our West-India islands, though under well-regulated restraint [*from Boswell's note*, which goes on to compare enslaved Africans to Scottish Highlanders, whom Boswell considered primitive, who protested the union of 1707 with England].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The initial letter W (line 25) provided by Boswell indicates William Wilberforce (1759–1833), leader of the parliamentary antislavery faction, member for Kingston upon Hull in the north of England, and a passionate evangelical Christian (see line 28).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The question now agitated in the British Parliament concerning slavery, is illustrated with great information, able argument, and perspicuous expression, in a work entitled, *Doubts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, by an Old Member of Parliament*; printed for Stockdale, in Picadilly, 1790. It is ascribed to John Ranby, Esq. [*Boswell's note*, which goes on to acknowledge that the "evils" of enslavement should "be humanely remedied" without abolition, praising the Slave Trade Act of 1788, also known as Dolben's Act, which limited the number of enslaved people who could be transported in ships, based on the ships' sizes].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Wilberforce was a little over five feet tall.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Manchester Petition [*Boswell's note*]. The petitioning campaign for abolition, begun in 1788 in support of the 1789

abolition bill, included one from Manchester, a center of textile manufacture, with around 11,000 signatures (about a fifth of the city's population).[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Vote. "Clown": an unsophisticated, rustic person, a peasant.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A long dagger carried by men in the Scottish Highlands; also a small, ceremonial version of this, worn tucked in a kilt by Highlanders. "Bony": an older spelling of *bonny*, Scottish term designating a pleasing appearance, with a play on the underfed leanness Boswell associates with his home country.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Some of the Scottish Presbyteries petitioned [*Boswell's note*]. Sixteen of the 101 petitions in favor of abolition submitted to Parliament in 1788 came from Scotland, most from the ecclesiastical courts, or presbyteries, representing congregations in particular areas.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Trade from the West Indies (which depended on enslavement), depicted metaphorically as the sun's rays.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The state of slavery is acknowledged in both the Old Testament and the New [*Boswell's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Galatians 6:5.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Those who perform manual labor.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Parish officer responsible for administering the Poor Laws, designed to provide relief and work for the poor, and keep them under supervision.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sir William Young has a series of pictures, in which the negroes in our plantations are justly and pleasingly exhibited in various scenes [*Boswell's note*]. Young (1724/5–1788), British plantation owner and holder of enslaved people, who served in various posts in the British West Indies, including governor of Dominica. The pictures to which Boswell refers could be those by Italian artist Agostino Brunias (ca. 1730–1796), who painted scenes of West Indian life for Young.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Cupid, god of love, is often depicted as blindfolded, or blind. "Driver": Boswell, elaborating his conceit that love is a



kind of slavery, compares Cupid to one who “drives” enslaved people, that is, one who forces them to work.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The poem is “Addressed to Miss ——,” and Boswell here seems to refer to her again; she has been tentatively identified as Frances Bagnall (or Bagnal), sister of the wife of Boswell’s friend Sir William Scott, Baron Stowell.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A city on the island of Cyprus, where Aphrodite (the Roman goddess Venus) landed after she rose from the sea, and where the worship of her was centered in the ancient world.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Angola blacks are the most ferocious [*from Boswell’s note*].[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The grueling, often fatal period of adjustment of enslaved people to life and work on British plantations in the Caribbean. “Between the decks”: that is, of an enslaver’s ship. Boswell further develops his comparison between his infatuation with a young woman and being brutalized in the transatlantic enslaving system.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Properly *code noir* (French, black code), French laws enacted by Louis XIV (1638–1715) in 1685 that regulated the conditions of enslavement in French colonies. Boswell presumably applies the term to his port, a fortified wine, because of its dark color. “REGULATION”: Boswell maintains his view that the trade in enslaved people should be better regulated, but not abolished. “*Chanson à boire*”: drinking song (French).[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *church*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *feebly witty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sifting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *empress*[Return to reference °](#)

- °: *academic theories*[Return to reference](#) °

## **PHILLIS WHEATLEY**

### **ca. 1753–1784**

The poet who would become Phillis Wheatley was born in West Africa around 1753—we do not know the details of precisely when and where. We do know, though, that enslavers forcibly took her, shipped her to America, and put her up for sale in 1761. While living in Boston as the legal property of John and Susanna Wheatley, the future poet learned to read and write, began to publish individual poems, and chose to be baptized as a Christian. Her book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, appeared in 1773, with a prefatory note in which important White male figures of Boston patronizingly vouch for their belief that Wheatley was capable of writing it. She was freed from enslavement later that year, and in 1778 she married John Peters, a free Black man. They had three children, but all of them died young. The poet herself died, poor, in 1784, and her grave is unmarked.



Frontispiece portrait engraving of **Phillis Wheatley**, in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, 1773, after a painting perhaps by Scipio Moorhead (see [p. 995](#) for Wheatley's poem addressed to him).

---

The name on the title page of her *Poems*—Phillis Wheatley—bears a violent history. We do not know what she was named in Africa when she was born. In America she became “Phillis,” named after the slaving ship that carried her through the Middle Passage to Boston. “Wheatley” was the last name of the family to which she was enslaved. Later, after her book had been published, she became free, married, and took on her husband’s last name, “Peters.” Many scholars today use the second last name as the only name she herself chose, one marking instead a history of love. Phillis Wheatley Peters later wrote another volume of poems—one that might have borne this chosen name and, as Black American poet June Jordan wrote in 1985, “would have been the poetry of someone who had chosen herself, free, and brave to be free in a land of slavery”—but Wheatley Peters was unable to arrange for its publication. This poet who could not get support for her second book, however, is now one of the most read and most important eighteenth-century writers.

Wheatley wrote in North America: she belongs in a tradition of American and African American literature. But she is also part of the British tradition. Her first big success was a poem on the English Methodist preacher George Whitefield, dedicated to the English Countess of Huntingdon, Selina Hastings. And when Wheatley was unable to get her poems published in Boston, Hastings helped her arrange for English publication. Wheatley traveled to London, where her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* were first printed in 1773. (On the journey, she penned a “Farewell to America”: “for *Britannia’s* distant shore / We sweep the liquid plain”). Moreover, Wheatley knew and admired the works of English poets like John Milton and Alexander Pope, and her poetry creatively repurposed the forms of Miltonic blank verse and Popean couplets. Like Milton and Pope, moreover, Wheatley is deeply interested in classical Greek and Latin poetic traditions—she meditates thoughtfully on her place in these in “To Maecenas.”

The neoclassical aspects of Wheatley’s work have sometimes disappointed or puzzled later readers, who seem to wish that she wrote in a more lyric or Romantic mode about her personal experiences and feelings. Other later readers have wanted her to be

more vehement or angry in her condemnation of slavery. Yet we should not wish these formally brilliant poems to be otherwise. We ought to respect, on her own terms, Wheatley's careful thinking about poetry, about her engagement in a learned tradition, and about what she could or should say.

## To Maecenas<sup>1</sup>

MAECENAS, you, beneath the myrtle shade,  
Read o'er what poets sung, and shepherds played.  
What felt those poets but you feel the same?  
Does not your soul possess the sacred flame?  
5 Their noble strains your equal genius shares  
In softer language, and diviner airs.

While Homer<sup>2</sup> paints Io! circumfused<sup>o</sup> in air,  
Celestial Gods in mortal forms appear;  
Swift as they move hear each recess rebound,  
10 Heav'n quakes, earth trembles, and the shores  
resound.

Great Sire of verse, before my mortal eyes,  
The lightnings blaze across the vaulted skies,  
And, as the thunder shakes the heav'nly plains,  
A deep-felt horror thrills through all my veins.  
When gentler strains demand thy graceful song,  
15 The length'ning line moves languishing along.  
When great Patroclus courts Achilles' aid,  
The grateful tribute of my tears is paid;  
Prone on the shore he feels the pangs of love,  
20 And stern Pelides<sup>3</sup> tend'rest passions move.

Great Maro's<sup>4</sup> strain in heav'nly numbers flows,  
The Nine<sup>5</sup> inspire, and all the bosom glows.  
O could I rival thine and Virgil's page,  
Or claim the Muses with the Mantuan Sage;<sup>o</sup>  
25 Soon the same beauties should my mind adorn,  
And the same ardors in my soul should burn:  
Then should my song in bolder notes arise,

And all my numbers pleasingly surprise;  
 But here I sit, and mourn a grov'ling mind,  
 That fain would mount, and ride upon the wind.  
 30

Not you, my friend, these plaintive<sup>o</sup> strains become,  
 Not you, whose bosom is the Muses' home;  
 When they from tow'ring Helicon<sup>6</sup> retire,  
 They fan in you the bright immortal fire,  
 But I less happy, cannot raise the song,  
 35 The fault'ring music dies upon my tongue.

The happier Terence<sup>7</sup> all the choir inspir'd,  
 His soul replenished, and his bosom fir'd;  
 But say, ye Muses, why this partial grace,  
 To one alone of Afric's sable race;  
 40 From age to age transmitting thus his name  
 With the first glory in the rolls of fame?

Thy virtues, great Maecenas! shall be sung  
 In praise of him, from whom those virtues sprung:  
 While blooming wreaths around thy temples spread,  
 45 I'll snatch a laurel from thine honored head, }  
 While you indulgent smile upon the deed. }

As long as Thames in streams majestic flows,  
 Or Naiads<sup>8</sup> in their oozy beds repose,  
 While Phoebus<sup>o</sup> reigns above the starry train,  
 50 While bright Aurora<sup>9</sup> purples o'er the main,  
 So long, great Sir, the muse thy praise shall sing,  
 So long thy praise shall make Parnassus<sup>1</sup> ring:  
 Then grant, Maecenas, thy paternal rays,  
 Hear me propitious,<sup>o</sup> and defend my lays.  
 55



- Note 1: Maecenas (70–8 B.C.E.) was a patron of poets in classical Rome, celebrated at the beginning of poems by Horace and Virgil. Wheatley uses the classical name to praise a patron in her own time (possibly Selina Hastings, John Wheatley, the man who held her enslaved, or Mather Byles, a Boston minister and poet who was among those who testified to the authenticity of Wheatley’s poems).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Greek poet celebrated as author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (probably somewhere around the 8th or 7th century B.C.E.). Wheatley addresses Homer throughout this stanza—he is the “Great Sire” at line 11 and the referent of “thy” at line 15.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A name for Achilles, a heroic warrior depicted in the *Iliad*. “Patroclus courts Achilles’ aid”: an incident from Book 16.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Maro is another name for the ancient Roman poet Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The nine classical Muses.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A mountain in Greece, fabled to be the home of the Muses.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: He was African by birth [*Wheatley’s note*]. Terence (ca. 195–159 B.C.E.), the great Roman playwright, was from North Africa, arrived in Rome while enslaved, and gained his freedom.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In Greek mythology, the spirits of rivers and streams.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: “The goddess that opens the gates of day; poetically, the morning” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Another mountain in Greece said to be the home of the Muses.[Return to reference 1](#)

## Notes

- °: *spread around*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Virgil*[Return to reference °](#)

- 〇: *sad, lamenting*[Return to reference](#) 〇
- 〇: *the sun*[Return to reference](#) 〇
- 〇: *favorably*[Return to reference](#) 〇

# To the University of Cambridge, in New-England<sup>1</sup>

While an intrinsic ardor prompts to write,  
The muses promise to assist my pen;  
'Twas not long since I left my native shore  
The land of errors, and Egyptian gloom:  
5 Father of mercy, 'twas thy gracious hand  
Brought me in safety from those dark abodes.

Students, to you 'tis giv'n to scan the heights  
Above, to traverse the ethereal space,  
And mark the systems of revolving worlds.  
Still more, ye sons of science ye receive  
10 The blissful news by messengers from heav'n,  
How Jesus' blood for your redemption flows.  
See him with hands out-stretcht upon the cross;  
Immense compassion in his bosom glows;  
He hears revilers,<sup>2</sup> nor resents their scorn:  
15 What matchless mercy in the Son of God!  
When the whole human race by sin had fall'n,  
He deigned to die that they might rise again,<sup>3</sup>  
And share with him in the sublimest skies,  
Life without death, and glory without end.

Improve your privileges while they stay,  
Ye pupils, and each hour redeem, that bears  
Or good or bad report of you to heav'n.  
Let sin, that baneful evil to the soul,  
By you be shunned, nor once remit<sup>o</sup> your guard;  
25 Suppress the deadly serpent in its egg.  
Ye blooming plants of human race divine,

An Ethiop<sup>4</sup> tells you 'tis your greatest foe;  
 Its transient sweetness turns to endless pain,  
 And in immense perdition<sup>5</sup> sinks the soul.

1773

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Harvard University (founded 1636) in Cambridge, then a Boston suburb.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: People who revile, or scorn, Jesus (and religion generally).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fundamental Christian teachings: human sin led to a fall from Eden, and Jesus died for these sins, "that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Used here as a general synonym for African.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: "Destruction; ruin; death"; also "Eternal death" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 5](#)

## Notes

- °: *relax*[Return to reference °](#)

# On Being Brought from Africa to America

5 'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,  
Taught my benighted soul to understand  
That there's a God, that there's a Savior too:  
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.  
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,  
"Their color is a diabolic die."  
Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,<sup>1</sup>  
May be refined, and join th' angelic train.

## Endnotes

1773

- Note 1: Biblical figure who killed his brother, Abel. Genesis 4:15 has God "sett[ing] a mark upon Cain"; in the 18th century, this "mark" was sometimes associated with Black skin.[Return to reference 1](#)

# Thoughts on the Works of Providence<sup>1</sup>

Arise, my soul, on wings enraptured, rise  
To praise the monarch of the earth and skies,  
Whose goodness and beneficence appear  
As round its center moves the rolling year,  
Or when the morning glows with rosy charms,  
5 Or the sun slumbers in the ocean's arms:  
Of light divine be a rich portion lent  
To guide my soul, and favor my intent.  
Celestial muse, my arduous flight sustain,  
And raise my mind to a seraphic<sup>o</sup> strain!

10 Adored for ever be the God unseen,  
Which round the sun revolves this vast machine,  
Though to his eye its mass a point appears:  
Adored the God that whirls surrounding spheres,<sup>o</sup>  
Which first ordained that mighty Sol<sup>o</sup> should reign  
15 The peerless monarch of th' ethereal train:  
Of miles twice forty millions<sup>2</sup> is his height,  
And yet his radiance dazzles mortal sight  
So far beneath—from him th' extended earth  
Vigor derives, and ev'ry flow'ry birth:  
20 Vast through her orb<sup>3</sup> she moves with easy grace  
Around her Phoebus in unbounded space;  
True to her course th' impetuous storm derides,<sup>4</sup>  
Triumphant o'er the winds, and surging tides.

25 Almighty, in these wond'rous works of thine,  
What Pow'r, what Wisdom, and what Goodness  
shine?  
And are thy wonders, Lord, by men explored,  
And yet creating glory unadored!

Creation smiles in various beauty gay,  
While day to night, and night succeeds to day:  
30 That Wisdom, which attends Jehovah's<sup>o</sup> ways,  
Shines most conspicuous in the solar rays:  
Without them, destitute of heat and light,  
This world would be the reign of endless night:  
35 In their excess how would our race<sup>5</sup> complain,  
Abhorring life! how hate its length'ned chain!  
From air adust<sup>6</sup> what num'rous ills would rise?  
What dire contagion taint the burning skies?  
What pestilential vapors, fraught with death,  
40 Would rise, and overspread the lands beneath?

Hail, smiling morn, that from the orient<sup>7</sup> main  
Ascending dost adorn the heav'nly plain!  
So rich, so various are thy beauteous dies,  
That spread through all the circuit of the skies,  
45 That, full of thee, my soul in rapture soars,  
And thy great God, the cause of all adores.

O'er beings infinite his love extends,  
His Wisdom rules them, and his Pow'r defends.  
When tasks diurnal<sup>o</sup> tire the human frame,  
The spirits faint, and dim the vital flame,  
50 Then too that ever active bounty shines,  
Which not infinity of space confines.  
The sable veil, that Night in silence draws,  
Conceals effects, but shows th' Almighty Cause;  
Night seals in sleep the wide creation fair,  
55 And all is peaceful but the brow of care.  
Again, gay Phoebus, as the day before,  
Wakes ev'ry eye, but what shall wake no more;  
Again the face of nature is renewed,  
Which still appears harmonious, fair, and good.  
60 May grateful strains salute the smiling morn,  
Before its beams the eastern hills adorn!

Shall day to day and night to night conspire  
To show the goodness of the Almighty Sire?  
This mental voice shall man regardless hear,  
65 And never, never raise the filial pray'r?  
To-day, O hearken, nor your folly mourn  
For time misspent, that never will return.

But see the sons of vegetation<sup>8</sup> rise,  
And spread their leafy banners to the skies.  
70 All-wise Almighty Providence we trace  
In trees, and plants, and all the flow'ry race;  
As clear as in the nobler frame of man,  
All lovely copies of the Maker's plan.  
The pow'r the same that forms a ray of light,  
75 That called creation from eternal night.  
"Let there be light," he said:<sup>9</sup> from his profound<sup>1</sup>  
Old Chaos heard, and trembled at the sound:  
Swift as the word, inspir'd by pow'r divine,  
Behold the light around its maker shine,  
80 The first fair product of th' omnific<sup>2</sup> God,  
And now through all his works diffused abroad.

As reason's pow'rs by day our God disclose,  
So we may trace him in the night's repose:  
Say what is sleep? and dreams how passing  
85 strange!<sup>3</sup>

When action ceases, and ideas range  
Licentious and unbounded o'er the plains,  
Where Fancy's queen in giddy triumph reigns.  
Hear in soft strains the dreaming lover sigh  
To a kind fair, or rave in jealousy;  
90 On pleasure now, and now on vengeance bent,  
The lab'ring passions struggle for a vent.  
What pow'r, O man! thy reason then restores,  
So long suspended in nocturnal hours?



95      What secret hand returns the mental train,  
And gives improved thine active pow'rs again?  
From thee, O man, what gratitude should rise!  
And, when from balmy sleep thou op'st thine  
          eyes,  
          Let thy first thoughts be praises to the skies. }  
100      How merciful our God who thus imparts  
O'erflowing tides of joy to human hearts,  
When wants and woes might be our righteous lot,  
Our God forgetting, by our God forgot!

          Among the mental pow'rs a question rose,  
          "What most the image of th' Eternal shows?"  
105      When thus to Reason (so let Fancy rove)  
Her great companion spoke immortal Love.<sup>4</sup>

          "Say, mighty pow'r, how long shall strife prevail,  
          And with its murmurs load the whisp'ring gale?  
          Refer the cause to Recollection's shrine,  
110      Who loud proclaims my origin divine,  
The cause whence heav'n and earth began to be,  
And is not man immortalized by me?  
Reason let this most causeless strife subside."  
115      Thus Love pronounced, and Reason thus replied.

          "Thy birth, celestial queen! 'tis mine to own,  
          In thee resplendent is the Godhead shown;  
          Thy words persuade, my soul enraptured feels  
          Resistless beauty which thy smile reveals."  
120      Ardent she spoke, and, kindling at her charms,  
She clasped the blooming goddess in her arms.

          Infinite Love where'er we turn our eyes  
          Appears: this ev'ry creature's wants supplies;  
          This most is heard in Nature's constant voice,  
          This makes the morn, and this the eve rejoice;

125 This bids the fost'ring rains and dew's descend  
 To nourish all, to serve one gen'ral end,  
 The good of man: yet man ungrateful pays  
 But little homage, and but little praise.  
 130 To him,<sup>o</sup> whose works arrayed with mercy shine,  
 What songs should rise, how constant, how divine!

## Endnotes

1773

- Note 1: Providence is "The care of God over created beings; divine superintendence" (Johnson's *Dictionary*). In this poem Wheatley participates in Christian and scientific traditions of finding admirable design and wisdom in God's creation, or "Works."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A period estimate of the distance between the sun and the earth.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The orbit of Earth (personified as a woman).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Earth "derides" (or scorns) unpredictable weather phenomena, staying "True to her course."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The human race.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "Burnt up; hot as with fire, scorched" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Eastern, where the sun rises.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Plants.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Genesis 1:3: "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Deep abyss.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "All-creating" (Johnson's *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Shakespeare, *Othello* 1.3.159: "'twas passing strange."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Love (personified as Reason's companion) is about to speak.[Return to reference 4](#)

# Notes

- °: *angelic*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *planets*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *the sun*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God's*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *daily*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *God*[Return to reference](#) °

# On Imagination

Thy various works, imperial queen,<sup>1</sup> we see,  
How bright their forms! how decked with pomp by  
thee!

Thy wond'rous acts in beauteous order stand,  
And all attest how potent is thine hand.

5      From Helicon's refulgent<sup>2</sup> heights attend,  
Ye sacred choir, and my attempts befriend:  
To tell her glories with a faithful tongue,  
Ye blooming graces, triumph in my song.

10      Now here, now there, the roving Fancy<sup>3</sup> flies,  
Till some loved object strikes her wand'ring eyes,  
Whose silken fetters all the senses bind,  
And soft captivity involves the mind.

15      Imagination! who can sing thy force?  
Or who describe the swiftness of thy course?  
Soaring through air to find the bright abode,  
Th' empyreal<sup>4</sup> palace of the thund'ring God,  
We on thy pinions<sup>o</sup> can surpass the wind,  
And leave the rolling universe behind:  
From star to star the mental optics rove,  
Measure the skies, and range the realms above.  
20      There in one view we grasp the mighty whole,  
Or with new worlds amaze th' unbounded soul.

25      Though Winter frowns to Fancy's raptured eyes  
The fields may flourish, and gay scenes arise;  
The frozen deeps may break their iron bands,  
And bid their waters murmur o'er the sands.

Fair Flora may resume her fragrant reign,  
And with her flow'ry riches deck the plain;  
Sylvanus<sup>5</sup> may diffuse his honors round,  
And all the forest may with leaves be crowned:  
30 Show'rs may descend, and dew's their gems disclose,  
And nectar sparkle on the blooming rose.

Such is thy pow'r, nor are thine orders vain,  
O thou the leader of the mental train:  
35 In full perfection all thy works are wrought,  
And thine the scepter o'er the realms of thought.  
Before thy throne the subject-passions<sup>6</sup> bow,  
Of subject-passions sov'reign ruler Thou;  
At thy command joy rushes on the heart,  
40 And through the glowing veins the spirits dart.

Fancy might now her silken pinions try  
To rise from earth, and sweep th' expanse on high:  
From Tithon's bed now might Aurora rise,<sup>7</sup>  
Her cheeks all glowing with celestial dyes,  
45 While a pure stream of light o'erflows the  
      skies. }

The monarch of the day I might behold,  
And all the mountains tipt with radiant gold,  
But I reluctant leave the pleasing views,  
Which Fancy dresses to delight the Muse;  
50 Winter austere forbids me to aspire,  
And northern tempests damp the rising fire;  
They chill the tides of Fancy's flowing sea,  
Cease then, my song, cease the unequal lay.

## Endnotes

1773

- Note 1: Wheatley addresses Imagination, personified as a queen. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: “Bright; shining; glittering; splendid” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*). “Helicon”: a mountain in Greece, the home of the Muses.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fancy is another word for imagination.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In the “highest and purest region of heaven” (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A personification or mythological god of forests (from Latin *sylva*, forest). “Flora”: a personification or mythological goddess of flowers (from Latin *flora*, flower).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Human passions imagined as subject to Imagination’s rule.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In Greek and Roman myth, Tithonus is the man loved by Aurora (called Eos in Greek), the goddess associated with dawn.[Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *wings*[Return to reference °](#)

**To the Right Honorable William, Earl of  
Dartmouth, His Majesty's Principal  
Secretary of State for North America, &c<sup>1</sup>**

Hail, happy day, when, smiling like the morn,  
Fair Freedom rose New-England to adorn:  
The northern clime beneath her genial ray,  
Dartmouth, congratulates thy blissful sway:  
5 Elate with hope her race no longer mourns,  
Each soul expands, each grateful bosom burns,  
While in thine hand with pleasure we behold  
The silken reins, and Freedom's charms unfold.  
Long lost to realms beneath the northern skies  
10 She shines supreme, while hated faction dies:  
Soon as appeared the Goddess long desir'd,  
Sick at the view, she<sup>2</sup> languished and expir'd;  
Thus from the splendors of the morning light  
The owl in sadness seeks the caves of night.

15 No more, America, in mournful strain  
Of wrongs, and grievance unredressed  
complain, }  
No longer shalt thou dread the iron chain,  
Which wanton Tyranny with lawless hand  
Had made, and with it meant t' enslave the land.<sup>3</sup>

20 Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,  
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,  
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,  
By feeling hearts alone best understood,  
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate  
Was snatched from Afric's fancied happy seat:

25      What pangs excruciating must molest,  
           What sorrows labor in my parent's breast?  
           Steeled was that soul and by no misery moved  
           That from a father seized his babe below'd:  
 30      Such, such my case. And can I then but pray  
           Others may never feel tyrannic sway?  
  
           For favors past, great Sir, our thanks are due,  
           And thee we ask thy favors to renew,  
           Since in thy pow'r, as in thy will before,  
           To sooth the griefs, which thou did'st once deplore.  
 35      May heav'nly grace the sacred sanction give  
           To all thy works, and thou for ever live  
           Not only on the wings of fleeting Fame,  
           Though praise immortal crowns the patriot's name,  
           But to conduct to heav'ns refulgent fane,<sup>o</sup>  
 40      May fiery coursers<sup>o</sup> sweep th' ethereal plain,  
           And bear thee upwards to that blest abode,  
           Where, like the prophet,<sup>4</sup> thou shalt find thy God.

## Endnotes

1773

- Note 1: In 1772, William Legge, second Earl of Dartmouth (1731–1801), was appointed as secretary of state in charge of the North American colonies. In the poem Wheatley addresses him, on the occasion of his appointment, with "hope" (line 5) for improved conditions in the colonies; in an accompanying letter, she had wished him "all Possible success, in your undertakings for the Interest of North America." [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Faction, personified, dies when the "Goddess," Freedom, appears. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Wheatley uses the common colonist rhetoric equating Britain's tyrannical imperial control with slavery. [Return to reference 3](#)



- Note 4: A reference to 2 Kings 2:11: “there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire,” and “Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.”[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *sacred place*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *horses*[Return to reference °](#)

## To S. M., a Young African Painter, on Seeing His Works<sup>1</sup>

To show the lab'ring bosom's deep intent,  
And thought in living characters to paint,  
When first thy pencil did those beauties give,  
And breathing figures learnt from thee to live,  
5 How did those prospects give my soul delight,  
A new creation rushing on my sight?  
Still, wond'rous youth! each noble path pursue,  
On deathless glories fix thine ardent view:  
Still may the painter's and the poet's fire  
10 To aid thy pencil, and thy verse conspire!  
And may the charms of each seraphic<sup>o</sup> theme  
Conduct thy footsteps to immortal fame!  
High to the blissful wonders of the skies  
Elate thy soul, and raise thy wishful eyes.  
Thrice happy, when exalted to survey  
15 That splendid city, crowned with endless day,  
Whose twice six gates on radiant hinges ring:  
Celestial Salem<sup>2</sup> blooms in endless spring.

Calm and serene thy moments glide along,  
And may the muse inspire each future song!  
20 Still, with the sweets of contemplation blessed,  
May peace with balmy wings your soul invest!<sup>3</sup>  
But when these shades of time are chased away,  
And darkness ends in everlasting day,  
On what seraphic pinions shall we move,  
25 And view the landscapes in the realms above?  
There shall thy tongue in heav'nly murmurs flow,  
And there my muse with heav'nly transport glow:

No more to tell of Damon's tender sighs,<sup>4</sup>  
 Or rising radiance of Aurora's eyes,  
 For nobler themes demand a nobler strain,  
 And purer language on th' ethereal plain.  
 Cease, gentle muse! the solemn gloom of night  
 Now seals the fair creation from my sight.

## Endnotes

1773

- Note 1: S. M. is Scipio Moorhead, an enslaved young painter in Boston. He might be the artist of the portrait of Wheatley that served as the source of her book's famous frontispiece engraving (see p. 986).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Jerusalem was also called Salem; Wheatley imagines a heavenly city.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Johnson's *Dictionary* gives relevant definitions: "to adorn" but also "to inclose" or "surround."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Damon is a classical pastoral name, and a lover's "sighs" a pastoral theme.[Return to reference 4](#)

## Notes

- °: *angelic*[Return to reference °](#)

## Letter to Samson Occom<sup>1</sup>

Rev'd and honored Sir,

I have this day received your obliging kind epistle, and am greatly satisfied with your reasons respecting the Negroes, and think highly reasonable what you offer in vindication of their natural rights: Those that invade them cannot be insensible that the divine light is chasing away the thick darkness which broods over the land of Africa; and the Chaos which has reigned so long is converting into beautiful Order, and reveals more and more clearly the glorious dispensation of civil and religious liberty, which are so inseparably united, that there is little or no enjoyment of one without the other: Otherwise, perhaps, the Israelites had been less solicitous for their freedom from Egyptian slavery; I don't say they would have been contented without it, by no means, for in every human breast, God has implanted a principle, which we call love of freedom; it is impatient of oppression, and pants for deliverance; and by the leave of our modern Egyptians<sup>2</sup> I will assert, that the same principle lives in us. God grant deliverance in his own way and time, and get him honor upon all those whose avarice impels them to countenance and help forward the calamities of their fellow creatures. This I desire not for their hurt, but to convince them of the strange absurdity of their conduct whose words and actions are so diametrically opposite. How well the cry for liberty and the reverse disposition for the exercise of oppressive power over others agree—I humbly think it does not require the penetration of a philosopher to determine.

### Endnotes

1774

- Note 1: This letter is from February 11, 1774, and a month later, on March 11, it was published in the *Connecticut Gazette*, where an unnamed editorial voice patronizingly offered Wheatley's

letter to readers “as a Specimen of her Ingenuity.” Wheatley had gained her freedom the previous fall. On Samson Occom, see p. 355.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Wheatley’s biographer Vincent Carretta explains: Wheatley “equate[s] contemporaneous slave owners—‘Modern Egyptians’—with Old Testament villains, and by implication people of African descent with the Israelites, God’s chosen people.” “By the leave of”: with the permission of.[Return to reference 2](#)

# Sentiment

The connection between literature and the emotions has been a focus of critical attention since ancient times. Aristotle's *Poetics* (ca. 330 B.C.E.), for instance, says that the aim of tragedy is to arouse pity and fear. And religious and moral writing has always been intent on the passions, though their influence has usually been seen as negative. (Five of the Seven Deadly Sins, including Greed and Envy, are passions.) But a profound reevaluation of the social meaning and power of feeling developed in Britain in the eighteenth century. Changes in practices of material culture helped drive this transformation. The massive growth of Britain's commercial wealth in the period depended on ever more encounters between strangers—buyers and sellers, retailers and consumers, travelers and locals—in big cities (especially, of course, London), stock exchanges and shops, and public places like coffeehouses, parks, and assemblies. And this gave cultural commentators a reason to stress the pleasing emotions arising from commerce, a term used to signify both sociable and financial exchange. The English philosopher Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), remarked in 1709 that in a civil society, “we polish one another, and rub off our Corners and rough Sides by a sort of *amicable Collision*”; people coming together socially reveal and refine their naturally warm feelings toward each other. The Anglo-Dutch physician and philosopher Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733) retorted gleefully that greed, pride, and selfishness make a society thrive, not amicability or politeness. Either way, the passions had a new, crucial role to play: they made a nation prosperous and happy. The debate engaged other notable thinkers, including the Irish-Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), who took Shaftesbury's side, arguing that God had implanted naturally benevolent feelings in all of us toward each other. Some began to insist that we own up to the fact that feelings are our sole source of energy and motivation:

"reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them," declared David Hume (see below). Finally Hutcheson's student and Hume's friend Adam Smith would unite the period's dual emphases on feelings and commercial activity to help lay the ideological foundations of the modern age: in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), he argued that a nation prospered not by following moral rules and rational planning but by allowing free play to "the private interests and passions of individuals."

Literature invested in the new prestige of feelings. This created not only a new kind of content but also a new relationship between literary works and readers. One of the most influential novelists of the age, Samuel Richardson (1689–1761), wrote epistolary novels because letters supposedly written by the principal characters immersed readers in their emotional states more directly and immediately than a detached narration would. Samuel Johnson remarked, "if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself. But you must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story as only giving occasion to the sentiment." Johnson and others use the term *sentiment* to identify a kind of feeling that affects thinking: as the Scottish critic and philosopher Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782) puts it, "every thought prompted by passion is termed a *sentiment*." And the idea that plot could be almost entirely subordinated to the display of sentiment furnished fiction with a new motive, especially after the mid-eighteenth century. The works of Laurence Sterne, including *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), attained their high points in emotional episodes that would have been too insignificant for earlier fiction. In *Tristram*, Uncle Toby's refusal to kill a fly solicits the reader's own tenderness, and a chance encounter between Yorick, protagonist of *A Sentimental Journey*, and a passing monk leads to a sentimental exchange of their snuffboxes and a flood of tears. In *The Man of Feeling* (1771) by the Scottish writer Henry Mackenzie (see below), the tears flow so regularly, in incident

after incident, that they seem almost like a programmed response. The multitude of fictions after 1770 subtitled "A Sentimental Novel" promised to fulfill readers' expectations—to cry, feel their protagonists' sorrows, and sigh at the injustice of the world. Sentimentalism established itself in literature by promoting a set of recognizable emotional protocols and roles, which could be taken up by readers in the real world. But sentimental works also often pressed against their own conventions. Sterne enjoys the ironies as well as the affecting powers of his sentimental performances, and poets like Ann Yearsley (see below) recognize how the codes of sentiment could falsify as well as heighten her naturally strong feelings.

One region of culture over which sentiment exercised a profound and sometimes surprising influence was gender. Women's emotional susceptibility had long been seen as a given, and the era of sentiment exaggerated this purported aspect of feminine character yet more. "Great sensibility of taste is generally accompanied by lively passions," remarked the Scottish philosopher Alexander Gerard in 1759; "women have always been considered as possessing both in a more eminent degree than men." Women sometimes resisted this imperative, as Frances Greville does in her poem "A Prayer for Indifference" (see below). And though women poets after midcentury were often expected to produce poems addressed to Sentiment or to Sensibility—that aspect of the personality endowed with taste and prone to be affected by evocative situations and objects—they used them as opportunities to define and assert their own emotions. The culture of sentiment stretched expectations about men further. Sentimental men were expected to weep. Masculinity could include sympathy for the suffering of others, delicately emotional friendships between men, and a passion for sentimental literature, which men consumed at least as much as women. In many ways, the man of feeling was a kind of fantasy. Harley, the protagonist of Mackenzie's novel, is presented as an exceptional case, unlike other men. But the novel also includes



framing devices to show how rougher, less emotionally susceptible men may be touched by Harley's sensitivity in spite of themselves.

In literature and life, sentiment almost always entails a social situation, one person's encounter with some other being, a person or animal, or even an object imaginatively imbued with sentience. (Individuals rarely get sentimental all by themselves.) In his first book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759; see below), Adam Smith called the mechanism whereby people share their feelings "sympathy": our imaginations create in us, however imperfectly, versions of the feelings of someone else. We can sympathize with nearly any exhibited emotion, but Smith recognized that pain and suffering were especially powerful sympathetic objects. Scenes in prisons or hospitals, figures afflicted by poverty, oppression, or abuse, dogs or jackasses mistreated by hard-hearted owners recur in sentimental literature, which hence discovers a natural tendency to reflect on social cruelties and injustices. The exchange of letters in 1766 between the formerly enslaved man Ignatius Sancho and Sterne (see below) helped establish a sentimental strand in the literature of the abolitionist movement in Britain, a strand taken up by numerous writers appalled by the trade in enslaved people: White writers imagined what it felt like to be enslaved, torn from loved ones in Africa, abused in a British sugar colony.

But many have noted the limitations of sympathy as a political force. In the wake of his exchange with Sancho, Sterne finds that sentiment works best when directed at just one other person—he says the thought of multitudes of enslaved Africans "did but distract me." Often sentimental feeling can be an end in itself, so absorbing that it blocks people from trying to do anything about the pain with which they sympathize. Reflecting on slavery and injustice in her *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), Mary Wollstonecraft bitterly brushes aside a merely sentimental response: "such misery demands more than tears." Sympathy could seem like a kind of emotional vampirism, always on the hunt for sentimental stimulation from suffering people. Still, for many who understood and presented themselves as people of feeling, such as Sancho himself, and

Olaudah Equiano (see [p. 1081](#)), sentimental discourse was not a dead end but an opening door. A feeling for others' suffering may lead to feeling a commitment to relieve it. Though always very personal in motive and effect, sentiment as defined in the period nonetheless builds the feelings of others into our sense of ourselves and finds its purpose in closing distances between people.

# DAVID HUME

The boldness and radical intent of the thought of David Hume (1711–1776), the Scottish philosopher, essayist, and historian, could scarcely appear in a stronger light than in the following selection from his first book, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40). The *Treatise* is a work full of groundbreaking arguments: it questions what we can know about the relation of causes to effects, undermines commonsense notions of personal identity, and insists that the language of facts and the language of moral obligation are entirely distinct. This section dismisses a long philosophical tradition that had identified the passions as the chief enemies of moral life and recruited reason to block their influence and motivate good actions. For Hume, passions are always our sole motivations, moral or otherwise. Though Hume's argumentation here is intricate and rich in implication, his principal contention can be clearly drawn. Reason can identify what is true or false in our abstract ideas (by analyzing relations between them) or in our beliefs about the world (by assessing our experience of it). But such facts are in themselves inert. They do not matter to us unless our passion is already engaged in some situation to which they are relevant. Being told that  $2 + 2 = 4$  will not motivate us to do anything—unless greed, for instance, has already excited us about a scheme to double our money. A passion, in Hume's terminology, is an "original influence": unlike the conclusions of reason, a passion cannot be true or false—it just *is*—and while reason may help a passion attain its end, or lead it astray, it cannot demonstrate that any passion is somehow

“untrue.” “’Tis not contrary to reason,” Hume declares, “to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.” A flair for dramatic utterances like this one enlivens Hume’s prose, as he suddenly reveals how far his methodical thinking has led. But while Hume discovers a more complete power in passions over our motives, perhaps, than had ever been asserted before, he does not abandon us to a moral life governed by wildly passionate whims. At the section’s end, he maintains that morality is a contest not between reason and passion but between “calm passions” and violent ones, the former moderating, the latter out of control. The *Treatise* initially did not exercise much influence on discussions of morality in common life or philosophical discourse, and Hume would later repackage many of its arguments and observations in elegant, more accessible essays and enquiries. But its philosophically rigorous account of the passions’ motivational power anticipates a general impulse in British culture after midcentury: to recognize the basis of our moral lives in feelings.

# ***From A Treatise of Human Nature***

### ***Book 2, Part 3, Section 3. Of the Influencing Motives of the Will***

Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates.<sup>1</sup> Every rational creature, 'tis said, is obliged to regulate his actions by reason; and if any other motive or principle challenge the direction of his conduct, he ought to oppose it, till it be entirely subdued, or at least brought to a conformity with that superior principle. On this method of thinking, the greatest part of moral philosophy, ancient and modern, seems to be founded; nor is there an ampler field, as well for metaphysical arguments, as popular declamations, than this supposed preeminence of reason above passion. The eternity, invariableness, and divine origin of the former have been displayed to the best advantage; the blindness, unconstancy, and deceitfulness of the latter have been as strongly insisted on. In order to show the fallacy of all this philosophy, I shall endeavor to prove *first*, that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will; and *secondly*, that it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will.

The understanding<sup>2</sup> exerts itself after two different ways, as it judges from demonstration or probability; as it regards the abstract relations of our ideas, or those relations of objects of which experience only gives us information. I believe it scarce will be asserted that the first species of reasoning alone is ever the cause of any action. As its proper province is the world of ideas, and as the will always places us in that of realities, demonstration and volition seem, upon that account, to be totally removed from each other. Mathematics, indeed, are useful in all mechanical operations, and arithmetic in almost every art and profession: But 'tis not of themselves they have any influence. Mechanics are the art of regulating the motions of bodies *to some designed end or purpose*; and the reason why we employ arithmetic in fixing the proportions of numbers is only that we may discover the proportions of their

influence and operation. A merchant is desirous of knowing the sum total of his accounts with any person. Why? but that he may learn what sum will have the same *effects* in paying his debt, and going to market, as all the particular articles taken together.<sup>3</sup> Abstract or demonstrative reasoning, therefore, never influences any of our actions, but only as it directs our judgment concerning causes and effects; which leads us to the second operation of the understanding.

'Tis obvious that when we have the prospect of pain or pleasure from any object, we feel a consequent emotion of aversion or propensity, and are carried to avoid or embrace what will give us this uneasiness or satisfaction. 'Tis also obvious, that this emotion rests not here, but making us cast our view on every side, comprehends whatever objects are connected with its original one by the relation of cause and effect. Here then reasoning takes place to discover this relation; and according as our reasoning varies, our actions receive a subsequent variation. But 'tis evident in this case that the impulse arises not from reason, but is only directed by it. 'Tis from the prospect of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises towards any object. And these emotions extend themselves to the causes and effects of that object, as they are pointed out to us by reason and experience. It can never in the least concern us to know that such objects are causes, and such others effects, if both the causes and effects be indifferent to us. Where the objects themselves do not affect us, their connexion can never give them any influence; and 'tis plain, that as reason is nothing but the discovery of this connexion, it cannot be by its means that the objects are able to affect us.

Since reason alone can never produce any action, or give rise to volition, I infer, that the same faculty is as incapable of preventing volition, or of disputing the preference with any passion or emotion. This consequence is necessary. 'Tis impossible reason could have the latter effect of preventing volition, but by giving an impulse in a contrary direction to our passion; and that impulse, had it operated alone, would have been able to produce volition. Nothing can

oppose or retard the impulse of passion, but a contrary impulse; and if this contrary impulse ever arises from reason, that latter faculty must have an original influence on the will, and must be able to cause, as well as hinder any act of volition. But if reason has no original influence, 'tis impossible it can withstand any principle which has such an efficacy, or ever keep the mind in suspense a moment. Thus it appears that the principle which opposes our passion cannot be the same with reason, and is only called so in an improper sense. We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and of reason. Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. As this opinion may appear somewhat extraordinary, it may not be improper to confirm it by some other considerations.

A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence,<sup>4</sup> and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification. When I am angry, I am actually possessed with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high. 'Tis impossible, therefore, that this passion can be opposed by or be contradictory to truth and reason; since this contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, considered as copies, with those objects, which they represent.

What may at first occur on this head is that as nothing can be contrary to truth or reason except what has a reference to it, and as the judgments of our understanding only have this reference, it must follow, that passions can be contrary to reason only so far as they are *accompanied* with some judgment or opinion. According to this principle, which is so obvious and natural, 'tis only in two senses that any affection can be called unreasonable. First, when a passion, such as hope or fear, grief or joy, despair or security, is founded on the supposition or the existence of objects, which really do not exist. Secondly, when in exerting any passion in action, we choose means insufficient for the designed end, and deceive ourselves in our



judgment of causes and effects. Where a passion is neither founded on false suppositions, nor chooses means insufficient for the end, the understanding can neither justify nor condemn it. 'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to choose my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me. 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledged lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter. A trivial good may, from certain circumstances, produce a desire superior to what arises from the greatest and most valuable enjoyment; nor is there anything more extraordinary in this, than in mechanics to see one pound weight raise up a hundred by the advantage of its situation.<sup>5</sup> In short, a passion must be accompanied with some false judgment in order to its being unreasonable; and even then 'tis not the passion, properly speaking, which is unreasonable, but the judgment.

The consequences are evident. Since a passion can never, in any sense, be called unreasonable, but when founded on a false supposition or when it chooses means insufficient for the designed end, 'tis impossible that reason and passion can ever oppose each other, or dispute for the government of the will and actions. The moment we perceive the falsehood of any supposition, or the insufficiency of any means, our passions yield to our reason without any opposition. I may desire any fruit as of an excellent relish; but whenever you convince me of my mistake, my longing ceases. I may will the performance of certain actions as means of obtaining any desired good; but as my willing of these actions is only secondary, and founded on the supposition that they are causes of the proposed effect; as soon as I discover the falsehood of that supposition, they must become indifferent to me.

'Tis natural for one that does not examine objects with a strict philosophic eye, to imagine that those actions of the mind are entirely the same, which produce not a different sensation, and are not immediately distinguishable to the feeling and perception.

Reason, for instance, exerts itself without producing any sensible emotion; and except in the more sublime disquisitions of philosophy, or in the frivolous subtilties of the schools,<sup>6</sup> scarce ever conveys any pleasure or uneasiness. Hence it proceeds that every action of the mind which operates with the same calmness and tranquility is confounded with reason by all those who judge of things from the first view and appearance. Now 'tis certain there are certain calm desires and tendencies, which, though they be real passions, produce little emotion in the mind, and are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation. These desires are of two kinds; either certain instincts originally implanted in our natures, such as benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children; or the general appetite to good, and aversion to evil, considered merely as such. When any of these passions are calm, and cause no disorder in the soul, they are very readily taken for the determinations of reason, and are supposed to proceed from the same faculty, with that which judges of truth and falsehood. Their nature and principles have been supposed the same, because their sensations are not evidently different.

Beside these calm passions, which often determine the will, there are certain violent emotions of the same kind, which have likewise a great influence on that faculty. When I receive any injury from another, I often feel a violent passion of resentment, which makes me desire his evil and punishment, independent of all considerations of pleasure and advantage to myself. When I am immediately threatened with any grievous ill, my fears, apprehensions, and aversions rise to a great height, and produce a sensible<sup>7</sup> emotion.

The common error of metaphysicians has lain in ascribing the direction of the will entirely to one of these principles,<sup>8</sup> and supposing the other to have no influence. Men often act knowingly against their interest; for which reason the view of the greatest possible good does not always influence them. Men often counteract a violent passion in prosecution of their interests and designs; 'tis not therefore the present uneasiness alone which determines them. In general we may observe, that both these principles operate on

the will; and where they are contrary, that either of them prevails, according to the general character or present disposition of the person. What we call strength of mind implies the prevalence of the calm passions above the violent; though we may easily observe, there is no man so constantly possessed of this virtue, as never on any occasion to yield to the solicitations of passion and desire. From these variations of temper proceeds the great difficulty of deciding concerning the actions and resolutions of men, where there is any contrariety of motives and passions.

## Endnotes

1739–40

- Note 1: The conflict between reason and passion is a ubiquitous theme in 18th-century discourse on morals, philosophical and otherwise, and indeed the preponderance of Western moral philosophy going back at least to Plato (429?-347 B.C.E), though a tradition on which Hume draws, including English philosopher Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and Irish-Scottish philosopher and professor Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), postulated that we have an innate moral sense that imparts benevolent feelings that guide our actions.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hume uses the term *understanding* to refer to the two operations of reason: these consist, as he will say subsequently, of “demonstration” (logical or mathematical proof) and “probability” (empirical reasoning based on experience).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, a merchant calculates what he owes “any person,” and what that person owes him, to arrive at a specific total that will influence his choices to pay off his debts and sell goods.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A passion does not represent any state of affairs in the world, but rather is itself a thing in the world, or a particular, positive state (or “modification”) of a particular thing, that is, a person.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Hume refers to a lever, whereby a relatively small force may lift a heavier load.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The pointless disquisitions of medieval Scholastic philosophy, derived from Aristotle.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Felt, palpable.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Calm passions or violent passions.[Return to reference 8](#)

# ADAM SMITH

The Scottish philosopher, professor, and political economist Adam Smith (1723–1790) wrote two landmark works in the history of thought, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). The latter stands as the principal founding document of classical economics, while the former offers the richest, most evocative account in eighteenth-century British philosophy of the role of feelings in our moral lives. In the *Theory*, Smith draws inspiration from other major figures of the Scottish Enlightenment, notably his teacher at the University of Glasgow, Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), and his elder friend David Hume, by whom his thinking was especially influenced. But his work stands out for its attention to the origins of moral sentiments in social relationships, illustrated with psychologically complex examples. The first chapter of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, “Of Sympathy,” establishes this emphasis: our feelings, according to Smith, materialize in a kind of dialogue with those of others. By sympathy, Smith means something more than commiseration with sadness or pain: sympathy springs from our instinctive capacity to imagine what someone else is feeling—suffering, joy, triumph, anxiety, anything—and produce a version of that feeling in ourselves. Part of the interest of such sympathetic imagination arises from its imperfection. Smith begins by acknowledging the truism that we can never really feel what someone else feels. Sympathy helps us cross this gulf, and often recreates what is felt by others uncannily well. But sometimes it leads us to feel things that another person ought to feel but does

not; sometimes it simply fails to connect with particular emotions displayed by others, like rage; and sometimes it mimics feelings imputed to those, like the dead, who can feel nothing at all. The flexibility and subtlety of sympathy in the *Theory* make it particularly useful for thinking about literature. Smith directly refers to tragedy and prose fiction to substantiate his account. Sympathetic literary emotions are mirrorings, again, of feelings that do not really exist (feigned by actors or made up by authors). Especially pertinent to literature is Smith's idea of a sentiment's "situation": for another person's feeling to affect us properly, we need to know the story behind it. In the years after Smith's theory appeared, as authors increasingly put strong feeling at the center of literature, they also developed new ways to situate it, using embedded frame stories, suggestive fragments of prose, or intimate depictions of domestic life to bring what others feel, as Smith says, "home to ourselves."

# ***From The Theory of Moral Sentiments***

## ***Of Sympathy***

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner. That we often derive sorrow from the sorrow of others is too obvious to require any instances to prove it; for this sentiment, like all the other original passions of human nature, is by no means confined to the virtuous and humane, though they perhaps may feel it with the most exquisite sensibility. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it.

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.

Though our brother is upon the rack,<sup>1</sup> as long as we are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did and never can carry us beyond our own person,<sup>2</sup> and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body and become in some measure him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. His agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our

own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels. For as to be in pain or distress of any kind excites the most excessive sorrow, so to conceive or to imagine that we are in it, excites some degree of the same emotion, in proportion to the vivacity or dullness of the conception.

That this is the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others, that it is by changing places in fancy<sup>3</sup> with the sufferer, that we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels, may be demonstrated by many obvious observations, if it should not be thought sufficiently evident of itself. When we see a stroke aimed and just ready to fall upon the leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and draw back our own leg or our own arm; and when it does fall, we feel it in some measure, and are hurt by it as well as the sufferer. The mob,<sup>4</sup> when they are gazing at a dancer on the slack rope, naturally writhe and twist and balance their own bodies as they see him do, and as they feel that they themselves must do in his situation. Persons of delicate fibers<sup>5</sup> and a weak constitution of body complain, that in looking on the sores and ulcers that are exposed by beggars in the streets, they are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in the corresponding part of their own bodies. The horror which they conceive at the misery of those wretches affects that particular part in themselves more than any other; because that horror arises from conceiving what they themselves would suffer, if they really were the wretches whom they are looking upon, and if that particular part in themselves was actually affected in the same miserable manner. The very force of this conception is sufficient, in their feeble frames, to produce that itching or uneasy sensation complained of. Men of the most robust make observe that in looking upon sore eyes they often feel a very sensible soreness in their own, which proceeds from the same reason; that organ being in the strongest man more delicate than any other part of the body is in the weakest.

Neither is it those circumstances only which create pain or sorrow that call forth our fellow-feeling. Whatever is the passion which arises from any object in the person principally concerned, an



analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator. Our joy for the deliverance of those heroes of tragedy or romance<sup>6</sup> who interest us is as sincere as our grief for their distress, and our fellow-feeling with their misery is not more real than that with their happiness. We enter into their gratitude towards those faithful friends who did not desert them in their difficulties; and we heartily go along with their resentment against those perfidious traitors who injured, abandoned, or deceived them. In every passion of which the mind of man is susceptible, the emotions of the bystander always correspond to what, by bringing the case home to himself, he imagines should be the sentiments of the sufferer.

Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was perhaps originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever.

Upon some occasions sympathy may seem to arise merely from the view of a certain emotion in another person. The passions, upon some occasions, may seem to be transfused from one man to another, instantaneously, and antecedent to any knowledge of what excited them in the person principally concerned. Grief and joy, for example, strongly expressed in the look and gestures of any one, at once affect the spectator with some degree of a like painful or agreeable emotion. A smiling face is, to everybody that sees it, a cheerful object; as a sorrowful countenance, on the other hand, is a melancholy one.

This, however, does not hold universally, or with regard to every passion. There are some passions of which the expressions excite no sort of sympathy, but before we are acquainted with what gave occasion to them, serve rather to disgust and provoke us against them. The furious behavior of an angry man is more likely to exasperate us against himself than against his enemies. As we are unacquainted with his provocation, we cannot bring his case home to ourselves, nor conceive anything like the passions which it

excites. But we plainly see what is the situation of those with whom he is angry, and to what violence they may be exposed from so enraged an adversary. We readily, therefore, sympathize with their fear or resentment, and are immediately disposed to take party<sup>7</sup> against the man from whom they appear to be in danger.

If the very appearances of grief and joy inspire us with some degree of the like emotions, it is because they suggest to us the general idea of some good or bad fortune that has befallen the person in whom we observe them: and in these passions this is sufficient to have some little influence upon us. The effects of grief and joy terminate in the person who feels those emotions, of which the expressions do not, like those of resentment, suggest to us the idea of any other person for whom we are concerned, and whose interests are opposite to his. The general idea of good or bad fortune, therefore, creates some concern for the person who has met with it, but the general idea of provocation excites no sympathy with the anger of the man who has received it. Nature, it seems, teaches us to be more averse to enter into this passion, and, till informed of its cause, to be disposed rather to take part against it.

Even our sympathy with the grief or joy of another, before we are informed of the cause of either, is always extremely imperfect. General lamentations, which express nothing but the anguish of the sufferer, create rather a curiosity to enquire into his situation, along with some disposition to sympathize with him, than any actual sympathy that is very sensible.<sup>8</sup> The first question which we ask is, "What has befallen you?" Till this be answered, though we are uneasy both from the vague idea of his misfortune, and still more from torturing ourselves with conjectures about what it may be, yet our fellow-feeling is not very considerable.

Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion as from that of the situation which excites it. We sometimes feel for another a passion of which he himself seems to be altogether incapable; because when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his from the reality. We blush for the impudence and

rudeness of another, though he himself appears to have no sense of the impropriety of his own behavior; because we cannot help feeling with what confusion we ourselves should be covered, had we behaved in so absurd a manner.

Of all the calamities to which the condition of mortality exposes mankind, the loss of reason<sup>9</sup> appears, to those who have the least spark of humanity, by far the most dreadful, and they behold that last stage of human wretchedness with deeper commiseration than any other. But the poor wretch who is in it laughs and sings, perhaps, and is altogether insensible of his own misery. The anguish which humanity feels, therefore, at the sight of such an object, cannot be the reflection of any sentiment of the sufferer. The compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, and, what perhaps is impossible, was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment.

What are the pangs of a mother, when she hears the moanings of her infant that during the agony of disease cannot express what it feels? In her idea of what it suffers, she joins to its real helplessness her own consciousness of that helplessness, and her own terrors for the unknown consequences of its disorder; and out of all these, forms, for her own sorrow, the most complete image of misery and distress. The infant, however, feels only the uneasiness of the present instant, which can never be great. With regard to the future it is perfectly secure, and in its thoughtlessness and want of foresight possesses an antidote against fear and anxiety, the great tormentors of the human breast, from which reason and philosophy will in vain attempt to defend it when it grows up to a man.

We sympathize even with the dead, and overlooking what is of real importance in their situation, that awful<sup>1</sup> futurity which awaits them, we are chiefly affected by those circumstances which strike our senses, but can have no influence upon their happiness. It is miserable, we think, to be deprived of the light of the sun; to be shut out from life and conversation; to be laid in the cold grave a prey to corruption and the reptiles of the earth; to be no more

thought of in this world, but to be obliterated, in a little time, from the affections and almost from the memory of their dearest friends and relations. Surely, we imagine, we can never feel too much for those who have suffered so dreadful a calamity. The tribute of our fellow-feeling seems doubly due to them now when they are in danger of being forgot by everybody; and by the vain honors which we pay to their memory, we endeavor, for our own misery, artificially to keep alive our melancholy remembrance of their misfortune. That our sympathy can afford them no consolation seems to be an addition to their calamity; and to think that all we can do is unavailing, and that, what alleviates all other distress, the regret, the love, and the lamentation of their friends, can yield no comfort to them, serves only to exasperate our sense of their misery. The happiness of the dead, however, most assuredly is affected by none of these circumstances; nor is it the thought of these things which can ever disturb the security of their repose. The idea of that dreary and endless melancholy, which the fancy naturally ascribes to their condition, arises altogether from our joining to the change which has been produced upon them our own consciousness of that change; from our putting ourselves in their situation, and from our lodging, if I may be allowed to say so, our own living souls in their inanimated bodies, and thence conceiving what would be our emotions in this case. It is from this very illusion of the imagination which renders the foresight of our own dissolution so terrible to us, and the idea of those circumstances, which undoubtedly can give us no pain when we are dead, makes us miserable while we are alive. And from thence arises one of the most important principles in human nature, the dread of death, the great poison to the happiness, but the great restraint upon the injustice of mankind, which, while it afflicts and mortifies the individual, guards and protects the society.

## Endnotes

1759

- Note 1: An instrument of torture whereby a victim's body is stretched by degrees on a frame at the wrists and ankles.[Return](#)

[to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Body, individual existence.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Imagination.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Crowd.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Nerves.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A general term for long-form prose fiction, which for Smith would include the novel.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Take sides.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Felt, perceptible.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Insanity or madness.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Awe-inspiring.[Return to reference 1](#)

# FRANCES GREVILLE

Moving in the loftiest social circles, the poet Frances Greville (ca. 1727–1789), born Frances Macartney, was famous in her time for being a fashionable “beauty” and highly regarded for her witty, intellectually commanding conversation. Her poetry mostly consisted of clever verses about high society, intended to be ephemeral. But her poem “A Prayer for Indifference” captured the imagination of her age. It was likely written around 1756 and widely circulated in manuscript, then was published in various slightly different versions in compilations and anthologies through the 1760s and beyond. It has been called the most celebrated poem by a British woman in the second half of the eighteenth century. Her husband seemed to resent any public attention she gained, and their marriage went from bad to disastrous, ending by 1788 in a legal separation after he had lost all his own money and tried to lay hold of hers. Greville’s famous poem testifies to the power of sentimental feeling by its strenuous attempt to reject it. She asks for the protection of Indifference, personified as a nymph who will prevent her from feeling too much, and others from feeling too much for her. The poem was often printed with rejoinders, largely forgotten, from other poets praising sensibility, but Greville’s “Prayer” remains memorable for the intensity with which she renders the feelings she yearns to escape.

## A Prayer for Indifference

Oft I've implored the gods in vain,  
And prayed till I've been weary;  
For once I'll try my wish to gain  
Of Oberon,<sup>1</sup> the fairy.

5 Sweet airy being, wanton sprite,<sup>o</sup>  
That liv'st in woods unseen,  
And oft, by Cynthia's silver light,<sup>2</sup>  
Tripst<sup>o</sup> gaily o'er the green;

If ere thy pitying heart was moved  
(As ancient stories tell)  
10 And for th'Athenian maid who loved,  
Thou soughtst a wondrous spell,<sup>3</sup>

O! deign once more t'exert thy power;  
Haply some herb, or tree,  
15 Sovereign as juice from western flower,<sup>4</sup>  
Conceals a balm for me.

I ask no kind return of love,  
No tempting charm to please;  
Far from the heart such gifts remove,  
20 That sighs for peace and ease.

Nor ease, nor peace, the heart can know,  
That, like the needle true,<sup>5</sup>  
Turns at the touch of joy or woe,  
But turning trembles too.

25 Far as distress the soul can wound,

'Tis pain in each degree;<sup>o</sup>  
Bliss goes but to a certain bound;<sup>o</sup>  
Beyond is agony.

30 Then take this treacherous sense of mind,<sup>6</sup>  
Which dooms me still to smart;<sup>o</sup>  
Which pleasure can to pain refine,  
To pain new pangs impart.

35 O! haste to shed the sovereign balm,  
My shattered nerves new-string,  
And for my guest, serenely calm,  
The nymph Indifference bring.

40 At her approach, see Hope, see Fear,  
See Expectation fly,<sup>o</sup>  
With Disappointment in the rear,  
That blasts the promised joy.

The tears which Pity taught to flow  
My eyes shall then disown;  
The heart that throbbed at others' woe  
Shall then scarce feel its own.

45 The wounds which now each moment bleed,  
Each moment then shall close,  
And peaceful days shall still succeed  
To nights of calm repose.

50 O fairy elf, but grant me this,  
This one kind comfort send,  
And so may never-fading bliss  
Thy flowery paths attend!

So may the glow-worm's glimmering light  
Thy tiny footsteps lead  
To some new region of delight,



55                   Unknown to mortal tread;  
And be thy acorn goblets filled  
                  With heaven's ambrosial<sup>2</sup> dew,  
From sweetest freshest flowers distilled,  
60                   That shed fresh sweets for you.  
And what of life remains for me  
                  I'll pass in sober ease,  
Half pleased, contented will I be;  
                  Contented, half to please.

## 1756/7 **Endnotes**

1763

- Note 1: A king of fairies in medieval and early modern literature and folklore, and a prominent character in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream* (ca. 1595/6). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Moonlight. Cynthia is another name for Artemis, a Greek goddess of the moon. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon pities Helena, an "Athenian maid" who loves Demetrius, and orders his "knavish" fairy servant Puck to sprinkle a potion on the eyelids of Demetrius while he is asleep, which will make him fall in love with the first person he sees upon waking, intended to be Helena. Puck mistakenly puts the potion on the eyelids of another man, Lysander, who falls in love with Helena instead. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The potion Oberon sends Puck to find is extracted from "a little western flower . . . And maidens call it love-in-idleness" (2.1)—another name for pansy. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: As a compass's needle will always point to true north, a susceptible heart will always be affected by the emotions that accompany love. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Several 1760s versions have "sense of mine." "Sense": sensibility, sensitivity to emotion. [Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Ambrosia is the drink or food of the gods. "Acorn goblet": elves and fairies were said to drink out of acorn cups, or caps; see *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when Puck mentions elves who "climb into their acorn-cups" (2.1). [Return to reference 7](#)

## Notes

- °: *spirit* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *skips, dances* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *increment* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *limit* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *hurt* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *depart* [Return to reference °](#)

# IGNATIUS SANCHO

The remarkable life of Ignatius Sancho (ca. 1729–1780) began aboard an enslaver's ship, on which he was born in the midst of the Middle Passage. After he and his parents reached New Grenada, a vast Spanish colony in northern South America, his mother died of disease, and his father "defeated the miseries of slavery by suicide" (in the words of the early biography that originally introduced Sancho's *Letters*). Baptized as Ignatius by a Spanish bishop, Sancho was later taken, as a two-year-old, to Britain, where he was held enslaved by three unmarried sisters in Greenwich, who named him Sancho (after Don Quixote's squire) and refused to educate him. But as a child, he met John, second Duke of Montagu (1690–1749), who sponsored his education and to whose estate in Blackheath he escaped, at around age twenty, shortly after the duke's death. Sancho's initial rejection by the widowed duchess nearly drove him to despair, but she soon took him on as butler, a free and paid servant, to the household. Thereafter his relation to the Montagu family became a source of stability and support in his life: the duchess bequeathed an annuity of £30 to him at her death, and the next duke, her son George, took him on as his valet; and after ill health made it impossible for Sancho to continue in service, the Montagu family helped set him up as owner of a grocery store in London, in 1774. He shared this enterprise with his wife Anne (1733–1817), whom he had married in 1758; his first biographer describes her as "a very deserving young woman of West-Indian origin." The couple had seven children, four of whom lived to

adulthood. Sancho's life in London was that of a highly cultured and accomplished man. He composed and published a substantial body of music, including minuets, cotillons, country dances, and songs, many of which have been recorded and can be heard online today. (His early biography also mentions a "Theory of Music" that he published, but which is now lost.) His love of theater led him to write two plays (both also lost) and form friendships with eminent actors, including David Garrick and John Henderson; his friends also included many painters, professional and amateur, on whose work he would offer his judgment. He is said to be the first Black Briton to vote in parliamentary elections (1774 and 1780), a right secured by his status as an independent business owner and householder. When he died in 1780, of complications of gout and other ailments, he left behind a group of friends—writers, painters, and other artists, and people of every social station from servants to the nobility—who looked to him for guidance and sympathetic, playful, and critically minded friendship.

His fame as a writer had its beginnings in a letter he wrote in 1766 to the celebrated novelist Laurence Sterne, deploring the treatment of enslaved Africans in Britain's colonies and urging Sterne to advocate for them in print. Sterne's reply became an important text for the nascent British abolitionist movement when it was published, along with Sancho's letter, in his posthumous 1775 *Letters*. Sancho's own body of correspondence, published as *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* (2 volumes, 1782), also appeared after his death. Many of his stylistic gestures were influenced by his literary hero Sterne, such as a copious use of long dashes. The letters' thematic elements—such as a sympathetic connection to animals, and displays of benevolent feeling that extends far beyond the Christian world—also connect them to the larger body of sentimental literature of his time. He clearly intends to present himself in his correspondence as an exemplary man of feeling. But his unique position in British culture allowed him to do things with this role that other people of sentiment could not. As a Black man, he advocated for the people whom the British Empire

enslaved and exploited. He does not stop, as Sterne does, with single, affecting examples, but trenchantly diagnoses the whole system, and its base motivations ("money—money—money," as one selection below says, putting the sentimental dash to a new purpose). The letters document his times with uncommon keenness of observation. (A series on the Gordon Riots, not included here, offers powerful eyewitness testimony to the explosive anti-Catholic violence, looting, and arson that shook London in the summer of 1780.) But mostly the letters display the humanity, idiosyncratic charm, and confident intelligence of their author, which challenged racist assumptions of ordinary White readers, in Britain and beyond, in an unprecedented way.

***From* Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho,  
an African**

## ***Volume I, Letter XLVII***

TO MR. M—<sup>1</sup>

August 25, 1777.

JACK-ASSES.

My gall has been plentifully stirred—by the barbarity of a set of gentry,<sup>2</sup> who *every morning* offend my feelings—in their cruel parade through Charles Street<sup>3</sup> to and from market—they vend potatoes in the day—and thief in the night season.—A tall lazy villain was bestriding his poor beast (although loaded with two panniers<sup>4</sup> of potatoes at the same time) and another of his companions, was good-naturedly employed in whipping the poor sinking animal—that the gentleman-rider might enjoy the two-fold pleasure of blasphemy<sup>5</sup> and cruelty—this is a too common evil—and, for the honor of rationality, calls loudly for redress.—I do believe it might be in some measure amended—either by a hint in the papers, of the utility of impressing such vagrants for the king's service<sup>6</sup>—or by laying a heavy tax upon the poor Jack-asses—I prefer the former, both for thy sake and mine;—and, as I am convinced we feel instinctively the injuries of our *fellow creatures*, I do insist upon your exercising your talents in behalf of the honest sufferers.—I ever had a kind of sympathetic (call it what you please) for that animal—*and do I not love you?*<sup>7</sup>—Before Sterne had wrote them into respect,<sup>8</sup> I had a friendship for them—and many a civil greeting have I given them at casual meetings—what has ever (with me) stamped a kind of uncommon value and dignity upon the long-eared kind of the species, is that our Blessed Savior, in his day of worldly triumph, chose to use that in preference to the rest of his own blessed creation—“meek and lowly, riding upon an ass.”<sup>9</sup> I am convinced that the general inhumanity of mankind proceeds—first, from the cursed false principle of common education—and, secondly, from a total

indifference (if not disbelief) of the Christian faith;—a heart and mind impressed with a firm belief of the Christian tenets, must of course exercise itself in a constant uniform general philanthropy—such a being carries his heaven in his breast—and such be thou! therefore write me a bitter Philippick<sup>1</sup> against the misusers of Jack-asses—it shall honor a column in the Morning Post<sup>2</sup>—and I will bray—bray my thanks to you—thou shalt figure away the champion of poor friendless asses here—and hereafter shalt not be ashamed in the great day of retribution.<sup>3</sup>

Mrs. Sancho would send you some tamarinds.—I know not her reasons;—as I hate contentions, I contradicted not—but shrewdly suspects she thinks you want cooling;<sup>4</sup>—Do you hear, Sir? send me some more good news about your head.—Your letters will not be the less welcome for talking about J—M—,<sup>5</sup> but pray do not let vanity so master your judgement—to fancy yourself upon a footing with George for well looking:—if you were indeed a proof sheet—you was marred in the taking off—for George (ask the girls) is certainly the fairest impression.<sup>6</sup>

I had an order from Mr. H<sup>7</sup>—on Thursday night to see him do Falstaff—I put some money to it, and took Mary and Betsy<sup>8</sup> with me—it was Betty's first affair—and she enjoyed it in truth—H—'s Falstaff is entirely original—and I think as great as his Shylock;—he kept the house in a continual roar of laughter;—in some things he falls short of Quin<sup>9</sup>—in many I think him equal.—When I saw Quin play, he was at the height of his art, with thirty years judgement to guide him. H—, in seven years more, will be all that better—and confessedly the first<sup>1</sup> man on the English stage, or I am much mistaken.

I am reading a little pamphlet,<sup>2</sup> which I much like: it favors an opinion which I have long indulged—which is the improbability of eternal Damnation—a thought which almost petrifies one—and, in my opinion, derogatory to the fullness, glory, and benefit of the blessed expiation of the Son of the Most High God—who died for the sins of all—all—Jew, Turk, Infidel, and Heretic;—fair—sallow—brown



—tawney—black—and you—and I—and every son and daughter of Adam.—You must find eyes to read this book—head and heart—with a quickness of conception thou enjoyest—with many—many advantages—which have the love—and envy almost of yours,

I. SANCHO.

Respects in folio to Mrs. H——.<sup>3</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The letter is addressed to John Meheux (1751–1839), one of Sancho's frequent correspondents and a close friend.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Sancho uses the term ironically to refer to street vendors of vegetables, not to the landed upper echelon of British society; he will continue in this vein of class satire through the letter.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sancho opened his grocery store in 1774 at 19 Charles Street, now called King Charles Street, in Westminster, London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Large baskets for carrying food.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The donkey driver apparently curses as he whips the animal.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sancho contemplates the forced conscription of the vegetable sellers into Britain's armed forces, who were fighting in the American War of Independence when the letter was written.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sancho's letters to Meheux often playfully tease him in this way.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sterne fondly treats jackasses in both his novels; notably in Book 7, ch. 32 of *Tristram Shandy*, he feeds a macaroon to one suffering under a heavy load.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Sancho alludes to Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem, described in John 12:12–16, which itself alludes to Zechariah

9:9.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Angry speech of denunciation; the term derives from the speeches of Greek orator Demosthenes (384–322 B.C.E.) denouncing Philip of Macedon.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: London newspaper and scandal sheet that ran from 1772 to 1937; in Sancho's day it offered brief, angry items.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Judgment day. "Figure away": make a big impression as.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Tamarind seeds have a laxative effect, and "to cool" means to cause to flow. "Mrs. Sancho": Sancho had married his wife, born Ann (or Anne) Osbourne, in 1758.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, John Meheux, his addressee.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sancho's metaphor is from printing: John Meheux, his family's eldest son, may be a "proof sheet"—a page printed first to check for errors—but his younger brother George is the best copy from the press ("the fairest impression").[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: John Henderson (1747–1785), a distinguished Shakespearean actor of the day and a friend of Sancho's, who appeared as Falstaff in both *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in the summer of 1777, at the Haymarket Theatre. "Order": a free or reduced-price ticket.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sancho refers to his daughters Mary Ann (1763–1805) and Elizabeth (1766–1837), who was called both Betsy and Betty.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: James Quin (1693–1766), eminent English actor of Irish descent, of the generation before Henderson.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Best.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The pamphlet has not been identified.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The "Mrs. H——" referred to in letters by Sancho to Meheux has not been identified. "In folio": a folio is the largest

book, so Sancho pays his greatest respects to her.[Return to reference 3](#)

## ***Volume I, Letter LVII***

TO MR. F—<sup>4</sup>

Charles Street, January 27, 1778.

Full heartily and most cordially do I thank thee—good Mr. F—, for your kindness in sending the books—that upon the unchristian and most diabolical usage of my brother Negroes—the illegality—the horrid wickedness of the traffic—the cruel carnage and depopulation of the human species—is painted in such strong colors—that I should think would (if duly attended to) flash conviction—and produce remorse in every enlightened and candid reader.—The perusal affected me more than I can express;—indeed I felt a double or mixt sensation—for while my heart was torn for the sufferings—which, for aught I know—some of my nearest kin might have undergone—my bosom, at the same time, glowed with gratitude—and praise toward the humane—the Christian—the friendly and learned Author of that most valuable book.—Blest be your sect!<sup>5</sup>—and Heaven’s peace be upon them!—I, who, thank God! am no bigot—but honor virtue—and the practice of the great moral duties—equally in the turban—or the lawn-sleeves<sup>6</sup>—who think Heaven big enough for all the race of man—and hope to see and mix amongst the whole family of Adam in bliss hereafter—I with these notions (which, perhaps, some may style absurd) look upon the friendly Author—as a being far superior to any great name upon your continent.—I could wish that every member of each house of parliament had one of these books.—And if his Majesty perused one through before breakfast—though it might spoil his appetite—yet the consciousness of having it in his power to facilitate the great work—would give an additional sweetness to his tea.—Phyllis’s poems<sup>7</sup> do credit to nature—and put art—merely as art—to the blush.—It reflects nothing either to the glory or generosity of her master—if she is still his slave—except he glories in the *low vanity* of having in his wanton power a mind animated by Heaven—a genius superior to

himself—the list of splendid—titled—learned names, in confirmation of her being the real authoress,—alas! shows how very poor the acquisition of wealth and knowledge are—without generosity—feeling—and humanity.—These good great folks—all knew—and perhaps admired—nay, praised Genius in bondage—and then, like the Priests and the Levites in sacred writ, passed by—not one good Samaritan amongst them.<sup>8</sup>—I shall be ever glad to see you—and am, with many thanks,

Your most humble servant.  
IGNATIUS SANCHO.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Identified as Jabez Fisher (1717–1806), a Quaker of Philadelphia.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sancho refers to the Society of Friends, or Quakers, who early on opposed slavery staunchly. The reference leads scholars to suspect that the “Author” of the books whom Sancho celebrates is the Philadelphia Quaker Anthony Benezet, author of many antislavery works, including *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1772; see p. 939).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Part of the ceremonial attire of an Anglican (or Catholic) bishop. “Turban”: Sancho uses the term to signify adherents of Islam.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* by the Black American enslaved woman Phillis Wheatley had appeared in 1773 (see p. 985).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In the parable of the Good Samaritan in the gospel of Luke 10:25–37, Jesus tells of a priest and then a Levite who pass an injured traveler by without helping him; a Samaritan who passes next tends to the traveler’s wounds. “The real authoress”: A list of some twenty names appeared at the front of Wheatley’s book, including those of Thomas Hutchinson, Crown governor of Massachusetts, and John Hancock, testifying

to the authenticity of Wheatley's authorship of her work.[Return to reference 8](#)

**Volume II, LETTER I**

**TO MR. J—W—E.<sup>9</sup>**

1778.

Your good father insists on my scribbling a sheet of absurdities, and gives a notable reason for it, that is, "Jack will be pleased with it."—Now be it known to you—I have a respect both for father and son—yea for the whole family, who are every soul (that I have the honor or pleasure to know anything of) tinctured—and leavened with all the obsolete goodness of old times—so that a man runs some hazard, in being seen in the W—e's society, of being biased to Christianity.—I never see your poor Father—but his eyes betray his feelings—for the hopeful youth in India—a tear of joy dancing upon the lids—is a plaudit not to be equaled this side death!—See the effects of right-doing, my worthy friend—continue in the tract of rectitude—and despise poor paltry Europeans—titled Nabobs.<sup>1</sup>—Read your Bible—as day follows night, God's blessing follows virtue—honor—and riches bring up the rear—and the end is peace.—Courage, my boy—I have done preaching.—Old folks love to seem wise—and if you are silly enough to correspond with grey hairs—take the consequence.—I have had the pleasure of reading most of your letters, through the kindness of your father.—Youth is naturally prone to vanity—such is the weakness of Human Nature, that pride has a fortress in the best of hearts—I know no person that possesses a better than Johnny W—e—but although flattery is poison to youth, yet truth obliges me to confess that your correspondence betrays no symptom of vanity—but teems with truths of an honest affection—which merits praise—and commands esteem.

In some of your letters which I do not recollect, you speak (with honest indignation) of the treachery and chicanery of the natives.<sup>2</sup>—My good friend, you should remember from whom they learnt those vices:—the first Christian visitors found them a simple, harmless

people—but the cursed avidity for wealth urged these first visitors (and all the succeeding ones) to such acts of deception—and even wanton cruelty—that the poor ignorant natives soon learnt to turn the knavish and diabolical arts which they soon imbibed—upon their teachers.

I am sorry to observe that the practice of your country (which as a resident I love—and for its freedom—and for the many blessings I enjoy in it—shall ever have my warmest wishes—prayers—and blessings); I say, it is with reluctance that I must observe your country's conduct has been uniformly wicked in the East—West-Indies—and even on the coast of Guinea.—The grand object of English navigators—indeed of all Christian navigators—is money—money—money—for which I do not pretend to blame them—Commerce was meant by the goodness of the Deity to diffuse the various goods of the earth into every part—to unite mankind in the blessed chains of brotherly love—society—and mutual dependence:—the enlightened Christian should diffuse the riches of the Gospel of peace—with the commodities of his respective land—Commerce, attended with strict honesty—and with Religion for its companion—would be a blessing to every shore it touched at.—In Africa, the poor wretched natives—blessed with the most fertile and luxuriant soil—are rendered so much the more miserable for what Providence meant as a blessing:—the Christians' abominable traffic for slaves—and the horrid cruelty and treachery of the petty kings<sup>3</sup>—encouraged by their Christian customers—who carry them strong liquors, to enflame their national madness—and powder and bad firearms, to furnish them with the hellish means of killing and kidnapping.—But enough—it is a subject that sours my blood—and I am sure will not please the friendly bent of your social affections.—I mention these only to guard my friend against being too hasty in condemning the knavery of a people who bad as they may be—possibly—were made worse by their Christian visitors.—Make human nature thy study—wherever thou residest—whatever the religion—or the complexion—study their hearts.—Simplicity, kindness, and charity be thy guide—with these even savages will respect you—and God will bless you!



Your father—who sees every improvement of his boy with delight—observes that your hand-writing is much for the better—in truth, I think it as well as any modest man can wish:—if my long epistles do not frighten you—and I live till the return of next spring<sup>4</sup>—perhaps I shall be enabled to judge how much you are improved since your last favor:<sup>5</sup>—Write me a deal about the natives—the soil and produce—the domestic and interior manners of the people—customs—prejudices—fashions—and follies.—Alas! we have plenty of the two last here—and what is worse, we have politics—and a detestable Brother's war<sup>6</sup>—where the right hand is hacking and hewing the left—whilst angels weep at our madness—and devils rejoice at the ruinous prospect.

Mr. R—<sup>7</sup> and the ladies are well.—Johnny R—has favored me with a long letter; he is now grown familiar with danger<sup>8</sup>—and can bear the whistling of bullets—the cries and groans of the human species—the roll of drums—clangor of trumpets—shouts of combatants—and thunder of cannon—all these he can bear with soldier-like fortitude—with now and then a secret wish for the society of his London friends—in the sweet blessed security—of peace—and friendship.

This, young man, is my second letter;—I have wrote till I am stupid, I perceive—I ought to have found it out two pages back.—Mrs. Sancho joins me in good wishes—I join her in the same;—in which double sense believe me,

Yours, &c. &c.

I. SANCHO.

Very short.

Postscript.

It is with sincere pleasure I hear you have a lucrative establishment<sup>9</sup>—which will enable you to appear and act with decency;—your good sense will naturally lead you to proper œconomy<sup>1</sup>—as distant from frigid parsimony, as from a heedless extravagancy—but as you may possibly have some time to spare

upon your hands for necessary recreation—give me leave to obtrude my poor advice.—I have heard it more than once observed of fortunate adventurers—they have come home enriched in purse—but wretchedly barren in intellects—the mind, my dear Jack, wants food—as well as the stomach—why then should not one wish to increase in knowledge as well as money?—Young says—“Books are fair Virtue’s advocates and friends”<sup>2</sup>—now my advice is—to preserve about 20 *l.* a year for two or three seasons—by which means you may gradually form a useful, elegant, little library—suppose now the first year you send the order—and the money to your father—for the following books—which I recommend from my own superficial knowledge as useful.—A man should know a little of geography—history, nothing more useful, or pleasant.

Robertson’s Charles the Fifth, 4 vols.

Goldsmith’s History of Greece, 2 vols.

Ditto, of Rome, 2 vols.

Ditto, of England, 4 vols.

Two small volumes of Sermons—useful—and very sensible—by one Mr. Williams,<sup>3</sup> a dissenting minister—which are as well as fifty—for I love not a multiplicity of doctrines—a few plain tenets—easy—simple and directed to the heart—are better than volumes of controversial nonsense.—Spectators—Guardians—and Tatlers—you have of course.—Young’s Night-Thoughts—Milton—and Thomson’s Seasons<sup>4</sup> were my summer companions for near twenty years—they mended my heart—they improved my veneration to the Deity—and increased my love to my neighbors.

You have to thank God for strong natural parts<sup>5</sup>—a feeling humane heart—you write with sense and judicious discernment—improve yourself, my dear Jack, that if it should please God to return you to your friends with the fortune of a man in upper rank, the embellishments of your mind may be ever considered as greatly superior to your riches—and only inferior to the goodness of your heart. I give you the above as a sketch—your father and other of your friends will improve upon it in the course of time—I do indeed judge that the above is enough at first—in conformity with the old

adage—"A few Books and a few Friends, and those well chosen."  
Adieu. Yours,

I. SANCHO.

## Endnotes

1782

- Note 9: Jack Wingrave (1757–1797), the son of a friend of Sancho's, John Wingrave (1729–1807), was stationed as a soldier with the British East India Company in Calcutta (Kolkata) when this letter was written.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: From *nawab* (Urdu, "governor"), a term for a Muslim local ruler of the Mughal Empire in South Asia, extended to refer, as here, to a British person made extremely wealthy by the East India Company's activities in India.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Sancho provides a footnote quoting two letters, of 1776 and 1777, from Jack Wingrave, which disparage the inhabitants of India as "a set of canting, deceitful people."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The African kings who were encouraged by Europeans, and paid with European goods, to facilitate the transatlantic trade in enslaved people.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sancho suffered from gout and health problems brought on by obesity.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Letter.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The American War of Independence.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Roger Rush, a friend and correspondent of Sancho's, who served Sir Charles Bunbury as a valet.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: John Rush, Roger's brother, served as a surgeon during the American War of Independence.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A position in India that will allow him to make money.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Thriftiness.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Slightly misquoted from Edward Young, *Night-Thoughts, on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1742–45), Night 8, line 275.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: David Williams, *Sermons, Chiefly on Religious Hypocrisy* (1774). Sancho also recommends William Robertson, *The History of the Reign of Emperor Charles the Fifth* (4 vols., 1769–72); and Oliver Goldsmith, *The Grecian History* (2 vols., 1774), *The Roman History* (2 vols., 1769), and *The History of England* (4 vols., 1764–71).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sancho mentions a group of texts representative of polite literature in his century, including periodical essays collected from the *Spectator* (1711–12, 1714, principally by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele), the *Guardian* (1713, Richard Steele and others), and the *Tatler* (1709, Richard Steele and others); and poetry such as Edward Young's *Night-Thoughts* (see above), the works of John Milton (1608–1674), and James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726–30; see p. 726).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Talents, endowments.[Return to reference 5](#)

## ANTISLAVERY SENTIMENT: THE SANCHO–STERNE EXCHANGE

The exchange of letters between the great Anglo-Irish novelist and minister Laurence Sterne (1713–1768) and the wit, composer, and formerly enslaved man Ignatius Sancho (ca. 1729–1780; see above) illustrates the transformative moral power, and some of the political limitations, of literary idioms of sentiment. Without having met him, Sancho reached out in 1766 to Sterne, one of his favorite authors, who had condemned slavery in a brief passage in a published sermon. Sancho's letter urges Sterne to extend himself further to generate more sympathy for the enslaved Africans abused in Britain's Caribbean sugar colonies, without exactly asking him to advocate for the abolition of the transatlantic trade. Such advocacy would not become a political force in Britain until two decades later. But Sterne's tender reply itself was taken up in that struggle. Published in 1775 in a posthumous collection of Sterne's letters, it became a source of emotional conviction for abolitionists. Sancho first came to public notice as a result of this publication, and would himself posthumously gain fame as a letter-writer when his literary executors printed *The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* (1782), two years after his death. The two letters below, with the fictional vignettes by Sterne published in the wake of his exchange with Sancho, dramatize the way deep feeling for the suffering of others can be raised. Sancho's letter seems deliberately limited in scope: he asks Sterne to bestow merely "one half hour's attention" to slavery, and focuses as much on the pleasure such sympathy would bring Sterne as on the suffering of the kidnapped Africans on whose behalf he writes. In his reply, Sterne confesses a certain helplessness in the face of mass suffering, even as it fills his heart with sorrow. The stylistic devices shared by both letters—such as the copious dashes, representing sentimental pauses and transitions—

draw attention to the writer's evolving sympathetic feeling, and to that extent at least, away from the feeling's causes. (Sancho doubtless picked up the technique of the long, "Shandean" dash from his literary mentor.) The "tender tale" to which Sterne alludes in his letter to Sancho would appear in the final, ninth volume of his masterwork of literary experimentation, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759–67). The scene dramatizes the tentative development of an antiracist moral consciousness of two simple, isolated souls, Toby and Trim, who share a brief fragment of a story with only one detail: a Black girl in a shop brushing away flies without killing them. The chapter promises a fuller account of her suffering (and that of Trim's brother Tom) that never materializes. The ironies of fellow-feeling come fully into view in the excerpt from Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), published the year he died. The narrator Yorick, facing imprisonment himself, describes his effort to imagine the feelings of those who have lost their liberty. He finds that the vast scale of enslavement in colonial America simply blocks this sympathetic imagination, so he concocts an image of a "pale and feverish" man in prison, and manages the details of this fictional scenario according to his own sentimental whims. (In his letter, Sancho also seemed to allow that sentimental sympathy has trouble extending itself to multitudes, when he concedes that a "benevolent heart" might find sufficient gratification by contributing to the relief "only of one" enslaved person.) While sentiment can project sympathy across the globe, its imperative to locate suffering that can be brought "home to ourselves" (as Adam Smith says), or "near me" (in Sterne's words), also sometimes limits its reach.

## Sancho to Sterne

[July 1766]

REVEREND SIR,

It would be an insult on your humanity (or perhaps look like it) to apologize for the liberty I am taking.—I am one of those people whom the vulgar and illiberal call "*Negurs*."<sup>1</sup>—The first part of my life was rather unlucky, as I was placed in a family who judged ignorance the best and only security for obedience.—A little reading and writing I got by unwearied application.—The latter part of my life has been—thro' God's blessing, truly fortunate, having spent it in the service of one of the best families in the kingdom.<sup>2</sup>—My chief pleasure has been books.—Philanthropy I adore.—How very much, good Sir, am I (amongst millions) indebted to you for the character of your amiable uncle Toby!<sup>3</sup>—I declare, I would walk ten miles in the dog days, to shake hands with the honest corporal.<sup>4</sup>—Your Sermons<sup>5</sup> have touched me to the heart, and I hope have amended it, which brings me to the point.—In your tenth discourse, page seventy-eight, in the second volume—is this very affecting passage—"Consider how great a part of our species—in all ages down to this—have been trod under the feet of cruel and capricious tyrants, who would neither hear their cries, nor pity their distresses.—Consider slavery—what it is—how bitter a draught—and how many millions are made to drink it!"—Of all my favorite authors, not one has drawn a tear in favor of my miserable black brethren—excepting yourself, and the humane author of Sir George Ellison.<sup>6</sup>—I think you will forgive me;—I am sure you will applaud me for beseeching you to give one half hour's attention to slavery, as it is at this day practiced in our West Indies.—That subject, handled in your striking manner, would ease the yoke (perhaps) of many—but if only of one—Gracious God!—what a feast to a benevolent heart!—and, sure I am,

you are an epicurean<sup>7</sup> in acts of charity.—You, who are universally read, and as universally admired—you could not fail—Dear Sir, think in me you behold the uplifted hands of thousands of my brother Moors.<sup>8</sup>—Grief (you pathetically<sup>9</sup> observe) is eloquent;—figure to yourself their attitudes; hear their supplicating addresses!—alas!—you cannot refuse.—Humanity must comply—in which hope I beg permission to subscribe myself, Reverend, Sir, &c.

## I. SANCHO

### 1766 **Endnotes**

1782

- Note 1: A slur, derived from Middle French (*nègre*), with complex etymological influences from and cognates in other European languages in the 18th century and earlier, used chiefly in the Caribbean to refer to a Black person. “The liberty I am taking”: of writing to Sterne without knowing or having been introduced to him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The family of the Duke and Duchess of Montagu employed Sancho as a butler and then helped finance his grocery store in London.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A principal character in Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy*, Captain Toby Shandy was loved by readers for his gentleness and naivete (see excerpt from *Tristram Shandy* below).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Corporal Trim, another simple, affectionate character in *Tristram Shandy*, servant to Captain Toby Shandy (see below). “Dog days”: the hottest days of the summer.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: As the early volumes of *Tristram Shandy* were making Sterne a literary celebrity, he published two volumes of *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (1760), his own sermons, under the name of one of the characters of *Tristram*. As Sancho notes, the mention of slavery appears in Sermon X, in volume 2.[Return to reference 5](#)



- Note 6: Early in the two-volume novel *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766) by Sarah Scott (1720–1795), the title character is appalled by the brutal treatment of enslaved people in Jamaica, and the racism that accompanied and drove it.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: One who takes pleasure in; after the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (371–270 B.C.E), who taught that the happy life consisted of reasonable pleasures.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In older English usage, a term referring to a dark-skinned person, usually from North or sub-Saharan Africa; Sancho's usage of it in his day has a poetic or romantic quality.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Movingly.[Return to reference 9](#)

## Sterne to Sancho

Coxwould, July 27, 1766

There is a strange coincidence, Sancho, in the little events (as well as in the great ones) of this world: for I had been writing a tender tale of the sorrows of a friendless poor negro-girl, and my eyes had scarce done smarting with it, when your letter of recommendation, in behalf of so many of her brethren and sisters, came to me—but why *her brethren*?—or yours, Sancho! any more than mine? It is by the finest tints, and most insensible gradations, that nature descends from the fairest face about St James's,<sup>1</sup> to the sootiest complexion in Africa:—at which tint of these is it, that the ties of blood are to cease? and how many shades must we descend lower still in the scale, ere mercy is to vanish with them? But 'tis no uncommon thing, my good Sancho, for one half of the world to use the other half of it like brutes, and then endeavor to make 'em so.—For my own part, I never look *westward*, (when I am in a pensive mood at least) but I think of the burthens which our brothers and sisters are *there* carrying, and could I ease their shoulders from one ounce of them, I declare I would set out this hour upon a pilgrimage to Mecca for their sakes—which by the bye, Sancho, exceeds your walk of ten miles in about the same proportion, that a visit of humanity, should one of mere form.<sup>2</sup>—However, if you meant my Uncle Toby more he is your debtor.—If I can weave the tale I have wrote into the work I am about<sup>3</sup>—'tis at the service of the afflicted—and a much greater matter; for in serious truth, it casts a sad shade upon the world, that so great a part of it are, and have been so long bound in chains of darkness, and in chains of misery; and I cannot but both respect and felicitate you, that by so much laudable diligence you have broke the one—and that by falling into the hands of so good and merciful a family, Providence has rescued you from the other.

And so good-hearted Sancho adieu! and believe me I will not forget your letter.

Yours,  
L. STERNE.

## 1766 **Endnotes**

1775

- Note 1: The court of the British monarch in London.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, Sterne's long walk to Mecca for the sake of enslaved people would be longer than Sancho's "ten miles in the dog days" to the degree to which a genuinely benevolent mission ("a visit of humanity") is morally superior to one of politeness ("mere form"). In the next sentence, Sterne seems to wonder if Sancho meant to refer to Captain Toby Shandy instead of Corporal Trim, when Sancho said in his letter that he would undertake this journey "to shake hands with the honest corporal."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Book 9 of *Tristram Shandy*.[Return to reference 3](#)

# ***From The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy [Sterne]***

## **[UNCLE TOBY AND CORPORAL TRIM DISCUSS SLAVERY AND RACE]**

When Tom, an' please your honor,<sup>1</sup> got to the shop, there was nobody in it, but a poor negro girl, with a bunch of white feathers slightly tied to the end of a long cane, flapping away flies—not killing them.—'Tis a pretty picture! said my uncle Toby—she had suffered persecution, Trim, and had learnt mercy—

—She was good, an' please your honor, from nature, as well as from hardships; and there are circumstances in the story of that poor friendless slut,<sup>2</sup> that would melt a heart of stone, said Trim; and some dismal winter's evening, when your honor is in the humor, they shall be told you with the rest of Tom's story, for it makes a part of it—<sup>3</sup>

Then do not forget, Trim, said my uncle Toby.

A Negro has a soul? an' please your honor, said the corporal (doubtingly).

I am not much versed, corporal, quoth my uncle Toby, in things of that kind; but I suppose, God would not leave him without one, any more than thee or me—

—It would be putting one sadly over the head of<sup>4</sup> another, quoth the corporal.

It would so; said my uncle Toby. Why then, an' please your honor, is a black wench to be used<sup>5</sup> worse than a white one?

I can give no reason, said my uncle Toby—

—Only, cried the corporal, shaking his head, because she has no one to stand up for her—

—'Tis that very thing, Trim, quoth my uncle Toby,—which recommends her to protection—and her brethren with her; 'tis the

fortune of war which has put the whip into our hands *now*—where it may be hereafter, heaven knows!—but be it where it will, the brave, Trim! will not use it unkindly.

—God forbid, said the corporal.

Amen, responded my uncle Toby, laying his hand upon his heart.

## Endnotes

1767

- Note 1: A phrase Trim repeats as a form of politeness to his employer, Captain Shandy. “An’ ”: if (it). “Tom”: Trim’s brother, whose story he is telling. Tom enters the shop of a sausage-maker’s widow in Lisbon, whom he is courting.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In past usage, the term, for girl or woman, had a neutral or even a positive sense, in addition to various derogatory ones.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The novel, in its last volume at this point, never gets to this story.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In a position of superiority over.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Treated.[Return to reference 5](#)

# ***From A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy [Sterne]***

## **[THE STARLING]**

—And as for the Bastile!<sup>1</sup> the terror is in the word—Make the most of it you can, said I to myself, the Bastile is but another word for a tower—and a tower is but another word for a house you can't get out of—Mercy on the gouty! for they are in it twice a year—But with nine livres<sup>2</sup> a day, and pen and ink, and paper, and patience, albeit a man can't get out, he may do very well within—at least for a month or six weeks; at the end of which, if he is a harmless fellow, his innocence appears, and he comes out a better and wiser man than he went in.

I had some occasion (I forget what) to step into the court-yard, as I settled this account; and remember I walked down stairs in no small triumph with the conceit of my reasoning—Beshrew<sup>3</sup> the *somber* pencil! said I, vauntingly—for I envy not its powers, which paints the evils of life with so hard and deadly a coloring. The mind sits terrified at the objects she has magnified herself, and blackened: reduce them to their proper size and hue, she overlooks them—'Tis true, said I, correcting the proposition—the Bastile is not an evil to be despised—but strip it of its towers—fill up the fossè<sup>4</sup>—unbarricade the doors—call it simply a confinement, and suppose 'tis some tyrant of a distemper—and not of a man, which holds you in it—the evil vanishes, and you bear the other half without complaint.

I was interrupted in the hey-day of this soliloquy, with a voice which I took to be of a child, which complained "it could not get out."—I looked up and down the passage, and seeing neither man, woman, nor child, I went out without farther attention.

In my return back through the passage, I heard the same words repeated twice over; and looking up, I saw it was a starling hung in

a little cage.—“I can’t get out,—I can’t get out,” said the starling.<sup>5</sup>

I stood looking at the bird: and to every person who came through the passage it ran fluttering to the side towards which they approached it, with the same lamentation of its captivity—“I can’t get out,” said the starling—God help thee! said I, but I’ll let thee out, cost what it will; so I turned about the cage to get to the door; it was twisted and double twisted so fast with wire, there was no getting it open without pulling the cage to pieces—I took both hands to it.

The bird flew to the place where I was attempting his deliverance, and thrusting his head through the trellis,<sup>6</sup> pressed his breast against it, as if impatient—I fear, poor creature! said I, I cannot set thee at liberty—“No,” said the starling—“I can’t get out—I can’t get out,” said the starling.

I vow, I never had my affections more tenderly awakened; nor do I remember an incident in my life, where the dissipated spirits, to which my reason had been a bubble, were so suddenly called home.<sup>7</sup> Mechanical as the notes were, yet so true in tune to nature were they chanted, that in one moment they overthrew all my systematic reasonings upon the Bastile; and I heavily walked upstairs, unsaying every word I had said in going down them.

Disguise thyself as thou wilt, still, slavery! said I—still thou art a bitter draught; and though thousands in all ages have been made to drink of thee, thou art no less bitter on that account.—’Tis thou, thrice sweet and gracious goddess, addressing myself to LIBERTY, whom all in public or in private worship, whose taste is grateful, and ever wilt be so, till NATURE herself shall change—No *tint* of words can spot thy snowy mantle, or chymic<sup>8</sup> power turn thy scepter into iron—with thee to smile upon him as he eats his crust, the swain is happier than his monarch, from whose court thou art exiled—Gracious heaven! cried I, kneeling down upon the last step but one in my ascent—grant me but health, thou great Bestower of it, and give me but this fair goddess as my companion—and shower down thy miters, if it seems good unto thy divine providence, upon those heads which are aching for them.<sup>9</sup>

THE CAPTIVE.  
PARIS.

The bird in his cage pursued me into my room; I sat down close to my table, and leaning my head upon my hand, I began to figure<sup>1</sup> to myself the miseries of confinement. I was in a right frame for it, and so I gave full scope to my imagination.

I was going to begin with the millions of my fellow creatures born to no inheritance but slavery: but finding, however affecting the picture was, that I could not bring it near me, and that the multitude of sad groups in it did but distract me.—

—I took a single captive, and having first shut him up in his dungeon, I then looked through the twilight of his grated door to take his picture.

I beheld his body half wasted away with long expectation and confinement, and felt what kind of sickness of the heart it was which arises from hope deferred. Upon looking nearer I saw him pale and feverish: in thirty years the western breeze had not once fanned his blood—he had seen no sun, no moon, in all that time—nor had the voice of friend or kinsman breathed through his lattice—his children —

But here my heart began to bleed—and I was forced to go on with another part of the portrait.

He was sitting upon the ground upon a little straw, in the furthest corner of his dungeon, which was alternately his chair and bed: a little calendar of small sticks were laid at the head, notched all over with the dismal days and nights he had passed there—he had one of these little sticks in his hand, and with a rusty nail he was etching another day of misery to add to the heap. As I darkened the little light he had, he lifted up a hopeless eye towards the door, then cast it down—shook his head, and went on with his work of affliction. I heard his chains upon his legs, as he turned his body to lay his little stick upon the bundle—He gave a deep sigh—I saw the iron enter into his soul<sup>2</sup>—I burst into tears—I could not sustain the picture of confinement which my fancy had drawn—I started up from my chair,



and calling La Fleur, I bid him bespeak<sup>3</sup> me a *remise*, and have it ready at the door of the hotel by nine in the morning.

I'll go directly, said I, myself to Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul.<sup>4</sup>

La Fleur would have put me to bed; but—not willing he should see anything upon my cheek which would cost the honest fellow a heart ache—I told him I would go to bed by myself—and bid him go do the same.

## Endnotes

1768

- Note 1: State prison in Paris, usually spelled “Bastille” (French, a fortress or fortification), used by the French monarchy. Yorick, the English protagonist of *A Sentimental Journey*, realizes while visiting Paris that he has forgotten his passport, a potentially grave offense that may land him in prison, especially because Britain and France are at war.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A livre, an old unit of French currency, was worth between one and one and a half British shillings in the 18th century. “Gouty”: those afflicted by gout.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Curse.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A ditch fronting a fortification for defensive purposes.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Like parrots, European starlings can imitate a variety of sounds, including human speech.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Lattice or grate, part of the cage.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Made natural and reasonable again. “A bubble”: a dupe.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Chemical.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A miter, the ceremonial headwear of a bishop, signifies the peak of worldly success for Yorick, who is a minister in the Church of England; but he does not desire or ache for such success because liberty is enough for him.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Imagine.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Anglican Book of Common Prayer translates Psalms 105:18 “the iron entered his soul,” in a description of Joseph’s

captivity.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Call for, order. "La Fleur": Yorick's French servant who accompanies him on his journey.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Étienne François, marquis de Stainville, duc de Choiseul (1719–1785), French secretary of state, minister of war, and minister of the navy, whom Yorick will ask, through an intermediary, to supply him with a passport.[Return to reference 4](#)

# HENRY MACKENZIE

The fame of Henry Mackenzie (1745–1831), Scottish man of letters and lawyer, rests on the reputation of his first novel, *The Man of Feeling* (1771), though he wrote two others, as well as three plays, and numerous essays for the periodicals he edited, the *Mirror* (1779–80) and the *Lounger* (1785–87), on the model of Addison and Steele's *Spectator* (1711–14). He was a leader in the Scottish literary scene for five decades; a founding member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Scotland's national academy of arts, letters, and sciences; and he also pursued an important legal career, filling the post of Scotland's comptroller of taxes in 1779. When he died in 1831, Scotland lost a figure whose literary life and sensibility linked the Scottish Enlightenment to the Romantic era.

Readers today turn to *The Man of Feeling* to find one of the most intense expressions of the sentimental ethos that dominated the final three decades of the eighteenth century. Mackenzie's first novel follows his English literary forebears Laurence Sterne (1713–1768) and Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) in focusing on intricately situated feelings instead of plot. Like Sterne's experiments in fiction, the story of Mackenzie's protagonist, Harley, emerges in jumbled, anecdotal fragments: the book's structural conceit is that its text is pieced together by a person who knows nothing of Harley, from torn manuscript pages he found being used as wadding for a hunting rifle. Many sections are missing; the book begins at Chapter XI. But unlike Sterne's and Richardson's fictions, *The Man of Feeling* pursues a grim strain of social satire. The exemplar of true sensitivity, Harley,

travels to London—the center of a corrupt society—and back, and encounters numerous cheats, cynics, and morally desensitized people along the way, as well as those whom they have victimized. These victims, like Harley, are no match for the cruel world. The excerpt from the novel below distills the themes of sentimental literature so well that it was anthologized and published separately several times as “The Story of Old Edwards,” in the decades after the novel’s appearance. In it we meet a series of figures inviting Harley’s and the reader’s sympathy: Edwards himself, the old, disabled veteran and dispossessed tenant farmer, his destitute family, two family dogs who die pitiably, an old Indian man tortured by soldiers of the British East India Company, orphaned children, and so on. As this list indicates, a concern for justice often motivates Harley’s acts of sympathetic identification: landlords oppress the poor for their own comforts and amusement, humans wantonly abuse animals, and colonialists torment the peoples they colonize. Each anecdote of oppression calls forth Harley’s tears—and so many tears flow, in Edwards’s story and *The Man of Feeling* at large, that some later readers have found them laughable rather than touching. Harley’s state of hypersensitivity, unsurprisingly, blocks him from imagining, let alone fighting for, actual social change. As his conversation with Edwards about British crimes in India winds down, all he can do is sigh against “the general current of opinion” that applauds wealth gained by oppression, and resolve to “live sequestered from the noise of the multitude.” It is plain that *The Man of Feeling* intends to expose widespread injustice: the novel does not simply deplore a few exceptionally bad actors or incidents. If the protocols of sentiment leave Harley dispirited and withdrawn in the face of a bad world, the conclusions and actions to which they may lead readers are less easy to determine.

## ***From The Man of Feeling***

### ***Chapter XXXIV. He meets an old acquaintance.***

When the stage-coach arrived at the place of its destination,<sup>1</sup> Harley began to consider how he should proceed the remaining part of his journey. He was very civilly accosted<sup>2</sup> by the master of the inn where he alighted, who offered to accommodate him either with a post-chaise or horses, to any distance he had a mind: but as he did things frequently in a way different from what other people call natural, he refused these offers, and set out immediately a-foot, having first put a spare shirt in his pocket,<sup>3</sup> and given directions for the forwarding of his portmanteau. This was a method of traveling which he was accustomed to take: it saved the trouble of provision for any animal but himself, and left him at liberty to choose his quarters, either at an inn, or at the first cottage in which he saw a face he liked: nay, when he was not peculiarly attracted by the reasonable creation,<sup>4</sup> he would sometimes consort with a species of an inferior rank, and lay himself down to sleep by the side of a rock, or on the banks of a rivulet. He did few things without a motive, but his motives were rather eccentric: and the useful and expedient were terms which he held to be very indefinite, and which therefore he did not always apply to the sense they are commonly understood in.

The sun was now in his decline, and the evening remarkably serene, when he entered a hollow part of the road, which winded between the surrounding banks, and seamed the sward<sup>5</sup> in different lines, as the choice of travelers had directed them to tread it. It seemed to be little frequented now, for some of these had partly recovered their former verdure. The scene was such as induced Harley to stand and enjoy it; when, turning round, his notice was attracted by an object, which the fixture of his eye on the spot he walked had before prevented him from observing.

An old man, who from his dress seemed to have been a soldier, lay fast asleep on the ground; a knapsack was rested on a stone at his right hand, while his staff and brass-hilted sword were crossed at his left.

Harley looked on him with the most earnest attention. He was one of those figures which Salvator<sup>6</sup> would have drawn; nor was the surrounding scenery unlike the wildness of that painter's backgrounds. The banks on each side were covered with fantastic shrub-wood, and at a little distance, on the top of one of them, stood a fingerpost,<sup>7</sup> to mark the directions of two roads which diverged from the point where it was placed. A rock, with some dangling wild flowers, jutted out above where the soldier lay, on which grew the stump of a large tree, white with age, and a single twisted branch shaded his face as he slept. His face had the marks of manly comeliness impaired by time; his forehead was not altogether bald, but its hairs might have been numbered;<sup>8</sup> while a few white locks behind crossed the brown of his neck with a contrast the most venerable to a mind like Harley's. "Thou art old," said he to himself; "but age has not brought thee rest for its infirmities: I fear those silver hairs have not found shelter from thy country, though that neck has been bronzed in its service."<sup>9</sup> The stranger waked. He looked on Harley with the appearance of some confusion: it was a pain which he knew too well to think of causing in another; he turned and went on. The old man readjusted his knapsack, and followed in one of the tracts on the opposite side of the road.

When Harley heard the tread of his feet behind him, he could not help stealing back a glance at his fellow-traveler. He seemed to bend under the weight of his knapsack; he halted on his walk, and one of his arms was supported by a sling, and lay motionless across his breast. He had that steady look of sorrow, which indicates that its owner has gazed upon his griefs till he has forgotten to lament them; yet not without those streaks of complacency, which a good mind will sometimes throw into the countenance, through all the incumbent load of its depression.

He had now advanced nearer to Harley, and, with an uncertain sort of voice, begged to know what it was o'clock; "I fear," said he, "sleep has beguiled me of my time, and I shall hardly have light enough left to carry me to the end of my journey." "Father!" said Harley (who by this time found the romantic enthusiasm rising

within him) "how far do you mean to go?" "But a little way, Sir," returned the other; "and indeed it is but a little way I can manage now: 'tis just four miles from the height to the village, thither I am going." "I am going there too," said Harley; "we may make the road shorter to one another. You seem to have served your country, Sir, to have served it hardly too; 'tis a character<sup>1</sup> I have the highest esteem for.—I would not be impertinently inquisitive; but there is that in your appearance which excites my curiosity to know something more of you; in the meantime suffer me to carry that knapsack."

The old man gazed on him; a tear stood in his eye! "Young gentleman," said he, "you are too good; may heaven bless you for an old man's sake, who has nothing but his blessing to give! but my knapsack is so familiar to my shoulders, that I should walk the worse for wanting it; and it would be troublesome to you, who have not been used to its weight." "Far from it," answered Harley, "I should tread the lighter; it would be the most honorable badge I ever wore."

"Sir," said the stranger, who had looked earnestly in Harley's face during the last part of his discourse, "is not your name Harley?" "It is," replied he; "I am ashamed to say I have forgotten yours." "You may well have forgotten my face," said the stranger, "'tis a long time since you saw it; but possibly you may remember something of old Edwards."—"Edwards!" cried Harley, "oh! heavens!" and sprung to embrace him; "let me clasp those knees on which I have sat so often: Edwards!—I shall never forget that fireside, round which I have been so happy! But where, where have you been? where is Jack? where is your daughter? How has it fared with them, when fortune, I fear, has been so unkind to you?"—"Tis a long tale," replied Edwards; "but I will try to tell it you as we walk."

"When you was at school in the neighborhood, you remember me at Southhill: that farm had been possessed by my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, which last was a younger brother of that very man's ancestor, who is now lord of the manor.<sup>2</sup> I thought I managed it, as they had done, with prudence; I paid my rent regularly as it became due, and had always as much behind<sup>3</sup> as



gave bread to me and my children. But my last lease was out soon after you left that part of the country; and the squire, who had lately got a London attorney for his steward, would not renew it, because, he said, he did not choose to have any farm under £300 a year value on his estate; but offered to give me the preference on the same terms with another, if I chose to take the one he had marked out, of which mine was a part.

"What could I do, Mr. Harley? I feared the undertaking was too great for me; yet to leave, at my age, the house I had lived in from my cradle! I could not, Mr. Harley, I could not; there was not a tree about it that I did not look on as my father, my brother, or my child: so I even ran the risk, and took the squire's offer of the whole. But I had soon reason to repent of my bargain: the steward had taken care that my former farm should be the best land of the division: I was obliged to hire more servants, and I could not have my eye over them all; some unfavorable seasons followed one another, and I found my affairs entangling on my hands. To add to my distress, a considerable corn-factor<sup>4</sup> turned bankrupt with a sum of mine in his possession: I failed paying my rent so punctually as I was wont to do, and the same steward had my stock taken in execution<sup>5</sup> in a few days after. So, Mr. Harley, there was an end of my prosperity. However, there was as much produced from the sale of my effects as paid my debts and saved me from a jail: I thank God I wronged no man, and the world could never charge me with dishonesty.

"Had you seen us, Mr. Harley, when we were turned out of Southhill, I am sure you would have wept at the sight. You remember old Trusty, my shag house-dog; I shall never forget it while I live; the poor creature was blind with age, and could scarce crawl after us to the door; he went however as far as the gooseberry-bush; that you may remember stood on the left side of the yard; he was wont to bask in the sun there: when he had reached that spot, he stopped; we went on: I called to him; he wagged his tail, but did not stir: I called again; he lay down: I whistled, and cried Trusty; he gave a short howl, and died! I could

have lain down and died too; but God gave me strength to live for my children."

The old man now paused a moment to take breath. He eyed Harley's face; it was bathed in tears: 'twas a tale he had been accustomed to think often on; he dropped one tear, and no more.

"Though I was poor," continued he, "I was not altogether without credit. A gentleman in the neighborhood, who had a small farm unoccupied at the time, offered to let me have it, on giving security for the rent; which I made shift<sup>6</sup> to procure. It was a piece of ground which required management to make anything of; but it was nearly within the compass of my son's labor and my own. We exerted all our industry to bring it into some heart.<sup>7</sup> We began to succeed tolerably well, and lived contented on its produce, when an unlucky accident brought us under the displeasure of a neighboring justice of the peace, and broke all our family happiness again.

"My son was a remarkable good shooter; he had always kept a pointer on our former farm, and thought no harm in doing so now; when one day, having sprung a covey of birds on our own ground, the dog, of his own accord, followed them into the justice's. My son laid down his gun, and went after his dog to bring him back: the game-keeper, who had marked<sup>8</sup> the birds, came up, and seeing the pointer, shot him just as my son approached. The creature fell; my son ran up to him: he died with a complaining sort of cry at his master's feet. Jack could bear it no longer; but flying at the game-keeper, wrenched his gun out of his hand, and with the butt end of it, felled him to the ground.

"He had scarce got home, when a constable came with a warrant, and dragged him to prison; there he lay, for the justices would not take bail, till he was tried at the quarter-sessions<sup>9</sup> for the assault and battery. His fine was hard upon us to pay; we contrived however to live the worse for it, and make up the loss by our frugality: but the justice was not content with that punishment, and soon after had an opportunity of punishing us indeed.

"An officer with press-orders<sup>1</sup> came down to our county, and having met with the justices, agreed that they should pitch on a

certain number, who could most easily be spared from the county, whom he would take care to make it rid of: my son's name was in the justices' list.

"'Twas on a Christmas Eve, and the birthday too of my son's little boy. The night was piercing cold, and it blew a storm, with showers of hail and snow. We had made up a cheering fire in an inner room; I sat before it in my wicker-chair; blessing Providence, that had still left a shelter for me and my children. My son's two little ones were holding their gambols<sup>2</sup> around us; my heart warmed at the sight; I brought a bottle of my best ale, and all our misfortunes were forgotten.

"It had long been our custom to play a game at blind-man's-buff on that night, and it was not omitted now; so to it we fell, I, and my son, and his wife, the daughter of a neighboring farmer, who happened to be with us at the time, the two children, and an old maidservant, that had lived with me from a child. The lot fell on my son to be blindfolded: we had continued some time in our game, when he groped his way into an outer room in pursuit of some of us, who, he imagined, had taken shelter there; we kept snug in our places, and enjoyed his mistake. He had not been long there, when he was suddenly seized from behind; 'I shall have you now,' said he, and turned about. 'Shall you so, master?' answered the ruffian, who had laid hold of him; 'we shall make you play at another sort of game by and by.'"—At these words Harley started with a convulsive sort of motion, and grasping Edwards's sword, drew it half out of the scabbard, with a look of the most frantic wildness. Edwards gently replaced it in its sheath, and went on with his relation.

"On hearing these words in a strange voice, we all rushed out to discover the cause; the room by this time was almost full of the gang.<sup>3</sup> My daughter-in-law fainted at the sight; the maid and I ran to assist her, while my poor son remained motionless, gazing by turns on his children and their mother. We soon recovered her to life, and begged her to retire and wait the issue of the affair; but she flew to her husband, and clung round him in an agony of grief and terror.

"Amongst the gang there was one of a smoother aspect, whom, by his dress, we discovered to be a serjeant of foot: he came up to me, and told me, that my son had his choice of the sea or land service, whispering at the same time, that if he chose the land, he might get off, on procuring him another man, and paying a certain sum for his freedom. The money we could just muster up in the house, by the assistance of the maid, who produced, in a green bag, all the little savings of her service; but the man we could not expect to find. My daughter-in-law gazed upon her children with a look of the wildest despair: 'My poor infants!' said she, 'your father is forced from you; who shall now labor for your bread? or must your mother beg for herself and you?' I prayed her to be patient; but comfort I had none to give her. At last, calling the serjeant aside, I asked him, if I was too old to be accepted in place of my son? 'Why, I don't know,' said he; 'you are rather old to be sure, but yet the money may do much.' I put the money in his hand, and coming back to my children, 'Jack,' said I, 'you are free; live to give your wife and these little ones bread; I will go, my child, in your stead; I have but little life to lose, and if I stayed, I should add one to the wretches you left behind.' 'No,' replied my son, 'I am not that coward you imagine me; heaven forbid, that my father's grey hairs should be so exposed, while I sat idle at home; I am young, and able to endure much, and God will take care of you and my family.' 'Jack,' said I, 'I will put an end to this matter, you have never hitherto disobeyed me; I will not be contradicted in this; stay at home, I charge you, and, for my sake, be kind to my children.'

"Our parting, Mr. Harley, I cannot describe to you; it was the first time we ever had parted: the very press-gang could scarcely keep from tears; but the serjeant, who had seemed the softest before, was now the least moved of them all. He conducted me to a party of new-raised recruits, who lay at a village in the neighborhood; and we soon after joined the regiment. I had not been long with it when we were ordered to the East Indies, where I was soon made a serjeant, and might have picked up some money, if my heart had been as hard as some others were; but my nature was never of that

kind, that could think of making rich at the expense of my conscience.

"Amongst our prisoners was an old Indian, whom some of our officers supposed to have a treasure hidden somewhere; which is not an uncommon practice in that country. They pressed him to discover it. He declared he had none; but that would not satisfy them: so they ordered him to be tied to a stake, and suffer fifty lashes every morning till he should learn to speak out as they said. Oh! Mr. Harley, had you seen him, as I did, with his hands bound behind him, suffering in silence, while the big drops trickled down his shrivelled cheeks and wet his grey beard, which some of the inhuman soldiers plucked in scorn! I could not bear it, I could not for my soul, and one morning, when the rest of the guard were out of the way, I found means to let him escape. I was tried by a court-martial for negligence of my post, and ordered, in compassion of my age, and having got this wound in my arm, and that in my leg, in the service, only to suffer 300 lashes, and be turned out of the regiment; but my sentence was mitigated as to the lashes, and I had only 200. When I had suffered these, I was turned out of the camp, and had betwixt three and four hundred miles to travel before I could reach a sea-port, without guide to conduct me, or money to buy me provisions by the way. I set out however, resolved to walk as far as I could, and then to lay myself down and die. But I had scarce gone a mile, when I was met by the Indian whom I had delivered. He pressed me in his arms, and kissed the marks of the lashes on my back a thousand times: he led me to a little hut, where some friend of his dwelt, and after I was recovered of my wounds conducted me so far on my journey himself, and sent another Indian to guide me through the rest. When we parted he pulled out a purse with two hundred pieces of gold in it. 'Take this,' said he, 'my dear preserver, it is all I have been able to procure.' I begged him not to bring himself to poverty for my sake, who should probably have no need of it long, but he insisted on my accepting it. He embraced me: —'You are an Englishman,' said he, 'but the Great Spirit has given thee an Indian heart; may he bear up the weight of your old age,

and blunt the arrow that brings it rest!’ We parted; and not long after I made shift to get my passage to England. ’Tis but about a week since I landed, and I am going to end my days in the arms of my son. This sum may be of use to him and his children; ’tis all the value I put upon it. I thank heaven I never was covetous of wealth; I never had much, but was always so happy as to be contented with my little.”

When Edwards had ended his relation, Harley stood a while looking at him in silence; at last he pressed him in his arms, and when he had given vent to the fulness of his heart by a shower of tears, “Edwards,” said he, “let me hold thee to my bosom; let me imprint the virtue of thy sufferings on my soul. Come, my honored veteran! let me endeavor to soften the last days of a life, worn out in the service of humanity; call me also thy son, and let me cherish thee as a father.” Edwards, from whom the recollection of his own suffering had scarce forced a tear, now blubbered like a boy; he could not speak his gratitude, but by some short exclamations of blessings upon Harley.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: After traveling to London, Harley gets out of the stagecoach near his home in the countryside, the location of which is not specified in the novel.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Greeted.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sack, satchel.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Human beings, created by God as reasonable creatures. “Peculiarly”: especially.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cut through the grass.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Salvator Rosa (1615–1673), Italian painter, immensely popular in the 18th and early 19th centuries for his haunting figures and sublime, wild landscapes, seen as a proto-Romantic by art historians.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A signpost marking a crossroads, often in the shape of a hand with a finger pointing the way.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Counted.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The British government's lack of support for discharged soldiers was often deplored in the period.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Role, function in life.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, his great-grandfather was of the same noble blood as the landlord of the farm at which Edwards's side of the family had worked as tenants for generations.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Left over.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A dealer in grain.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Legally seized for nonpayment of debt.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Found an expedient.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Fertility.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Seen, spotted. Edwards's son is not allowed to hunt on his neighbor's property.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Local court sessions held four times a year.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Orders to forcibly recruit men into military service.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Playing.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Recruits were typically captured by groups of men called press-gangs.[Return to reference 3](#)

***Chapter XXXV. He misses an old acquaintance.—An  
adventure consequent upon it.***

When they had arrived within a little way of the village they journeyed to, Harley stopped short, and looked steadfastly on the mouldering walls of a ruined house that stood on the roadside. "Oh, heavens!" he cried, "what do I see: silent, unroofed, and desolate! Are all thy gay tenants gone? do I hear their hum no more? Edwards, look there, look there! the scene of my infant joys, my earliest friendships, laid waste and ruinous! That was the very school where I was boarded when you was at Southhill; 'tis but a twelvemonth since I saw it standing, and its benches filled with cherubims: that opposite side of the road was the green on which they sported; see it now ploughed up! I would have given fifty times its value to have saved it from the sacrilege of that plough."

"Dear sir," replied Edwards, "perhaps they have left it from choice, and may have got another spot as good." "They cannot," said Harley, "they cannot; I shall never see the sward covered with its daisies, nor pressed by the dance of the dear innocents: I shall never see that stump decked with the garlands which their little hands had gathered. These two long stones which now lie at the foot of it, were once the supports of a hut I myself assisted to rear: I have sat on the sods within it, when we had spread our banquet of apples before us, and been more blest—Oh! Edwards, infinitely more blest than ever I shall be again."

Just then a woman passed them on the road, and discovered<sup>4</sup> some signs of wonder at the attitude of Harley, who stood, with his hands folded together, looking with a moistened eye on the fallen pillars of the hut. He was too much entranced in thought to observe her at all; but Edwards civilly accosting her, desired to know, if that had not been the school-house, and how it came into the condition they now saw it in. "Alack a day!" said she, "it was the school-house indeed; but to be sure, Sir, the squire has pulled it down because it stood in the way of his prospects."<sup>5</sup> "What! how! prospects! pulled down!" cried Harley. "Yes, to be sure, sir; and the green, where the



children used to play, he has ploughed up, because, he said, they hurt his fence on the other side of it.”—“Curses on his narrow heart,” cried Harley, “that could violate a right so sacred! Heaven blast the wretch!

And from his derogate body never spring

A babe to honor him!—<sup>6</sup>

But I need not, Edwards, I need not” (recovering himself a little), “he is cursed enough already: to him the noblest source of happiness is denied; and the cares of his sordid soul shall gnaw it, while thou sittest over a brown crust, smiling on those mangled limbs that have saved thy son and his children!” “If you want anything with the school-mistress, sir,” said the woman, “I can show you the way to her house.” He followed her without knowing whither he went.

They stopped at the door of a snug-looking house, where sat an elderly woman with a boy and a girl before her, with each a supper of bread and milk in their hands. “There, Sir, is the school-mistress.”—“Madam,” said Harley, “was not an old venerable-looking man school-master here some time ago?” “Yes, sir, he was; poor man! the loss of his former school-house, I believe, broke his heart, for he died soon after it was taken down; and as another has not yet been found, I have that charge in the meantime.”—“And this boy and girl, I presume, are your pupils?”—“Ay, sir; they are poor orphans, put under my care by the parish; and more promising children I never saw.” “Orphans!” said Harley. “Yes, Sir, of honest creditable parents as any in the parish; and it is a shame for some folks to forget their relations, at a time when they have most need to remember them.”—“Madam,” said Harley, “let us never forget that we are all relations.” He kissed the children.

“Their father, sir,” continued she, “was a farmer here in the neighborhood, and a sober industrious man he was; but nobody can help misfortunes: what with bad crops, and bad debts, which are worse, his affairs went to wreck, and both he and his wife died of broken hearts. And a sweet couple they were, sir; there was not a properer man to look on in the county than John Edwards, and so

indeed were all the Edwardses." "What Edwardses?" cried the old soldier hastily. "The Edwardses of Southhill; and a worthy family they were."—"Southhill!" said he, in a languid voice, and fell back into the arms of the astonished Harley. The school-mistress ran for some water, and a smelling-bottle,<sup>7</sup> with the assistance of which they soon recovered the unfortunate Edwards. He stared wildly for some time, then folding his orphan grandchildren in his arms, "Oh! my children, my children," he cried, "have I found you thus? My poor Jack! art thou gone? I thought thou shouldst have carried thy father's grey hairs to the grave! And these little ones"—his tears choked his utterance, and he fell again on the necks of the children.

"My dear old man!" said Harley, "Providence has sent thee to relieve them; it will bless me, if I can be the means of assisting you." "Yes, indeed, sir," answered the boy; "father, when he was a-dying, bade God bless us; and prayed, that if grandfather lived, he might send him to support us."—"Where did they lay my boy?" said Edwards. "In the Old Churchyard," replied the woman, "hard<sup>8</sup> by his mother." "I will show it you," answered the boy, "for I have wept over it many a time, when first I came amongst strange folks."<sup>9</sup> He took the old man's hand, Harley laid hold of his sister's, and they walked in silence to the churchyard.

There was an old stone, with the corner broken off, and some letters, half-covered with moss, to denote the names of the dead: there was a cyphered<sup>1</sup> R. E. plainer than the rest; it was the tomb they sought. "Here it is, grandfather," said the boy. Edwards gazed upon it without uttering a word: the girl, who had only sighed before, now wept outright; her brother sobbed, but he stifled his sobbing. "I have told sister," said he, "that she should not take it so to heart; she can knit already, and I shall soon be able to dig, we shall not starve, sister, indeed we shall not, nor shall grandfather neither." The girl cried afresh; Harley kissed off her tears as they flowed, and wept between every kiss.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Demonstrated.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: It blocked his view.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Harley adapts King Lear's curse of his daughter Goneril, reversing the gender (see *King Lear* 1.4).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A bottle with smelling salts.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Close.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Strangers.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Interwoven, like letters of a monogram.[Return to reference 1](#)

### ***Chapter XXXVI. He returns home.—A description of his retinue.***

It was with some difficulty that Harley prevailed on the old man to leave the spot where the remains of his son were laid. At last, with the assistance of the school-mistress, he prevailed; and she accommodated Edwards and him with beds in her house, there being nothing like an inn nearer than the distance of some miles.

In the morning, Harley persuaded Edwards to come with the children, to his house, which was distant but a short day's journey. The boy walked in his grandfather's hand; and the name of Edwards procured him a neighboring farmer's horse, on which a servant mounted, with the girl seated on a pillow before him.

With this train Harley returned to the abode of his fathers: and we cannot but think, that his enjoyment was as great as if he had arrived from the tour of Europe, with a Swiss valet for his companion, and half a dozen snuff-boxes, with invisible hinges,<sup>2</sup> in his pocket. But we take our ideas from sounds which folly has invented; Fashion, Bon ton, and Vertù,<sup>3</sup> are the names of certain idols, to which we sacrifice the genuine pleasures of the soul: in this world of semblance, we are contented with personating<sup>4</sup> happiness; to feel it is an art beyond us.

It was otherwise with Harley: he ran upstairs to his aunt, with the history of his fellow-travellers glowing on his lips. His aunt was an œconomist;<sup>5</sup> but she knew the pleasure of doing charitable things, and withal was fond of her nephew, and solicitous to oblige him. She received old Edwards therefore with a look of more complacency than is perhaps natural to maiden ladies of threescore, and was remarkably attentive to his grandchildren: she roasted apples with her own hands for their supper, and made up a little bed beside her own for the girl. Edwards made some attempts towards an acknowledgment for these favors; but his young friend stopped them in their beginnings. "Whosoever receiveth any of these

children"<sup>6</sup>—said his aunt; for her acquaintance with her bible was habitual.

Early next morning, Harley stole into the room where Edwards lay: he expected to have found him a-bed; but in this he was mistaken: the old man had risen, and was leaning over his sleeping grandson, with the tears flowing down his cheeks. At first he did not perceive Harley; when he did, he endeavored to hide his grief, and crossing his eyes with his hand expressed his surprise at seeing him so early astir. "I was thinking of you," said Harley, "and your children: I learned last night that a small farm of mine in the neighborhood is now vacant: if you will occupy it, I shall gain a good neighbor, and be able in some measure to repay you the notice you took of me when a boy, and as the furniture of the house is mine, it will be so much trouble saved." Edwards's tears gushed afresh, and Harley led him to see the place he intended for him.

The house upon this farm was indeed little better than a hut; its situation, however, was pleasant, and Edwards, assisted by the beneficence of Harley, set about improving its neatness and convenience. He staked out a piece of the green before for a garden, and Peter, who acted in Harley's family as valet, butler, and gardener, had orders to furnish him with parcels of the different seeds he chose to sow in it. I have seen his master at work in this little spot, with his coat off, and his dibble<sup>7</sup> in his hand: it was a scene of tranquil virtue to have stopped an angel on his errands of mercy! Harley had contrived to lead a little bubbling brook through a green walk in the middle of the ground, upon which he had erected a mill in miniature for the diversion of Edwards's infant grandson, and made shift in its construction to introduce a pliant bit of wood, that answered with its fairy clack to the murmuring of the rill that turned it. I have seen him stand, listening to these mingled sounds, with his eye fixed on the boy, and the smile of conscious satisfaction on his cheek, while the old man, with a look half turned to Harley and half to heaven, breathed an ejaculation of gratitude and piety.

Father of mercies! I also would thank thee! that not only hast thou assigned eternal rewards to virtue, but that, even in this bad

world, the lines of our duty, and our happiness, are so frequently woven together.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Indicative of superior craftsmanship.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Taste, interest, or a depth of knowledge in the fine arts. “Bon ton”: fashionable social life.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Imitating or impersonating.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: One who keeps a strict, thrifty watch over domestic expenditures.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See Mark 9:37.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A stick used to make holes in which to plant seeds.[Return to reference 7](#)

***A FRAGMENT.<sup>8</sup> The Man of Feeling talks of what he does not understand.—An incident.***

\* \* \* "Edwards," said he, "I have a proper regard for the prosperity of my country: every native of it appropriates to himself some share of the power, or the fame, which, as a nation, it acquires; but I cannot throw off the man<sup>9</sup> so much, as to rejoice at our conquests in India. You tell me of immense territories subject to the English: I cannot think of their possessions, without being led to inquire, by what right they possess them. They came there as traders, bartering the commodities they brought for others which their purchasers could spare; and however great their profits were, they were then equitable. But what title have the subjects of another kingdom to establish an empire in India? to give laws to a country where the inhabitants received them on the terms of friendly commerce? You say they are happier under our regulations than the tyranny of their own petty princes. I must doubt it, from the conduct of those by whom these regulations have been made. They have drained the treasuries of Nabobs,<sup>1</sup> who must fill them by oppressing the industry of their subjects. Nor is this to be wondered at, when we consider the motive upon which those gentlemen do not deny their going to India. The fame of conquest, barbarous as that motive is, is but a secondary consideration: there are certain stations in wealth to which the warriors of the East<sup>2</sup> aspire. It is there indeed where the wishes of their friends assign them eminence, where the question of their country is pointed at their return. When shall I see a commander return from India in the pride of honorable poverty? You describe the victories they have gained; they are sullied by the cause in which they fought: you enumerate the spoils of those victories; they are covered with the blood of the vanquished!

"Could you tell me of some conqueror giving peace and happiness to the conquered? did he accept the gifts of their princes to use them for the comfort of those whose fathers, sons, or husbands, fell in battle? did he use his power to gain security and freedom to the regions of oppression and slavery? did he endear the

British name by examples of generosity, which the most depraved are rarely able to resist? did he return with the consciousness of duty discharged to his country, and humanity to his fellow-creatures? did he return with no lace on his coat, no slaves in his retinue, no chariot at his door, and no Burgundy at his table?—these were laurels which princes might envy—which an honest man would not condemn!”

“Your maxims, Mr. Harley, are certainly right,” said Edwards. “I am not capable of arguing with you; but I imagine there are great temptations in a great degree of riches, which it is no easy matter to resist: these a poor man like me cannot describe, because he never knew them; and perhaps I have reason to bless God that I never did; for then, it is likely, I should have withstood them no better than my neighbors. For you know, sir, that it is not the fashion now, as it was in former times, that I have read of in books, when your great generals died so poor, that they did not leave wherewithal to buy them a coffin; and people thought the better of their memories for it: if they did so nowadays, I question if anybody, except yourself, and some few such, would thank them a whit.”

“I am sorry,” replied Harley, “that there is so much truth in what you say; but however the general current of opinion may point, the feelings are not yet lost that applaud benevolence, and censure inhumanity. Let us endeavor to strengthen them in ourselves; and we, who live sequestered from the noise of the multitude, have better opportunities of listening undisturbed to their voice.”

They now approached the little dwelling of Edwards. A maidservant, whom he had hired to assist him in the care of his grandchildren, met them a little way from the house: “There is a young lady within with the children,” said she. Edwards expressed his surprise at the visit: it was however not the less true; and we mean to account for it.

This young lady then was no other than Miss Walton.<sup>3</sup> She had heard the old man’s history from Harley, as we have already related. Curiosity, or some other motive, prompted her to desire to see his grandchildren: this she had an opportunity of gratifying soon, the



children, in some of their walks, having strolled as far as her father's avenue. She put several questions to both; she was delighted with the simplicity of their answers, and promised, that if they continued to be good children, and do as their grandfather bid them, she would soon see them again, and bring some present or other for their reward. This promise she had performed now: she came attended only by her maid, and brought with her a complete suit of green for the boy, and a chintz gown, a cap, and a suit<sup>4</sup> of ribbons, for his sister. She had time enough, with her maid's assistance, to equip them in their new habiliments before Harley and Edwards returned. The boy heard his grandfather's voice, and, with that silent joy which his present finery inspired, ran to the door to meet him: putting one hand in his, with the other pointed to his sister, "See," said he, "what Miss Walton has brought us."—Edwards gazed on them. Harley fixed his eye on Miss Walton; hers were turned to the ground;—in Edwards's there was a beamy moisture.—He folded his hands together—"I cannot speak, young lady," said he, "to thank you." Nor could Harley neither. There were a thousand sentiments;—but they gushed so impetuously on his heart, that he could not utter a syllable. \* \* \*

## Endnotes

1771

- Note 8: In keeping with the novel's fragmentary structure, this "Fragment" intrudes to offer a conversation about British colonialism in India between Harley and Edwards, though its subsequent "Incident" follows from the previous point in the plot. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Divest himself of his humanity. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Anglicized form of *nawab* (Urdu, derived from *nawwāb*), local rulers of the Mughal Empire. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: British soldiers and officials of the East India Company. "Stations in wealth": positions in India whereby riches are secured by British colonialists. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The young woman with whom Harley is hopelessly and silently in love.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Set.[Return to reference 4](#)

## ELIZABETH RYVES

The poet, dramatist, and translator Elizabeth Ryves (1750–1797) inherited property from her family in her home country of Ireland, but she lost it in legal proceedings and went to London, where she attempted, and failed, to recover it by petitioning the government. She then tried to support herself there by writing. Though she got substantial work as a writer and translator, she remained desperately poor. Her *Poems on Several Occasions* appeared in 1777. A notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1797 printed after her death relates that when “she lodged in an obscure part of the city, she would spend her last shillings, herself unprovided with a dinner, in the purchase of a joint of meat for a starving family that occupied the floor above her.” The poem here proudly embraces a susceptibility to feeling while acknowledging its often painful costs.

# Ode to Sensibility

## *I.*

The sordid<sup>o</sup> wretch who ne'er has known,  
To feel for miseries not his own;  
Whose lazy pulse serenely beats,  
While injured worth her wrongs repeats;  
5 Dead to each sense of joy or pain,  
A useless link in nature's chain,<sup>1</sup>  
May boast the calm which I disdain.

## *II.*

Give me a generous soul, that glows  
With others' transports, others' woes;  
Whose noble nature scorns to bend,<sup>o</sup>  
10 Though Fate her iron scourge extend:  
But bravely bears the galling yoke,  
And smiles superior to the stroke,  
With spirit free and mind unbroke.

## *III.*

Yet, by compassion touched, not fear,  
15 Sheds the soft sympathizing tear,  
In tribute to affliction's claim,  
Or envied merit's wounded fame.  
Let Stoics scoff! I'd rather be  
Thus curst with sensibility,  
20 Than share their boasted apathy.<sup>2</sup>

## Endnotes

1777

- Note 1: An allusion to the notion of the great chain of being, in which higher and lower elements interlock in “one stupendous whole” (Pope, *An Essay on Man* 1, 267).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The aim of Stoic philosophy in ancient Greece was *apatheia* (Greek, “without pathos or passion”), an unperturbedness in the face of suffering.[Return to reference 2](#)

## Notes

- °: *coarse, despicable*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *submit*[Return to reference °](#)

## ANN YEARSLEY

The title page of the first book of poems by Ann Yearsley (1753–1806), published in 1785, identifies her as “a Milkwoman of Bristol.” Selling milk did not generate enough income to support her, her husband (designated as “a laborer” in local records), and their five children, and by 1784 the family had fallen into extreme poverty. Among the philanthropic people who came forward to help them was the poet and reformer Hannah More (see [p. 976](#)), who learned that Yearsley wrote poetry and sponsored the publication of her first book, generating a large list of eminent subscribers, and around £600. Yearsley’s relationship with More soon soured, as the latter insisted that the book’s profits be put in trust to keep the money away from Yearsley’s husband. Publicly angry at More for her interference, Yearsley eventually gained control of her money at the expense of the support and friendship of More and her circle. Her second book, *Poems on Various Subjects, by Ann Yearsley, Milkwoman of Clifton, Near Bristol* (1787), found other well-connected subscribers. She continued her literary career, writing a play that was produced at Bristol in 1789 (published 1791), a long historical novel (1795), and a final volume of poetry (1796), as well as several stand-alone works, such as *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* (1786).

The poem “Addressed to Sensibility” appears first in her second book and sets its tone. Sensibility was seen as an especially interesting topic for women poets in the period, and the word occurred in many of their poems’ titles; Hannah More’s own poem

"Sensibility" appeared in 1782. But Yearsley's work is distinguished by the complex perspective she brings to sensibility. Her own susceptibility to emotion governs her life, but she also understands that literary feeling is a refined discourse deployed by those more educated and socially elevated than herself. Her poem is crowded with various sentimental figures and scenarios conjured by memory, including a youth in Bedlam, an institution in London where the mentally ill were confined, a "haughty insult" that ended a friendship (it is hard here not to recall her relationship with More), and the tears of a pastoral figure, Lysander, which elicit the speaker's sympathy. The pain consistently caused by sensibility seems to lead Yearsley to reject it. (Later in *Poems on Various Subjects*, a companion poem to this one titled "To Indifference" will implore, "leave me, Sensibility!") But by the end of "Addressed to Sensibility," Yearsley seems to value the honesty of her own pain. Unlike the refined, educated, rule-bound sensibility that has become a mode of feeling affected by the wise and fashionable, Yearsley comes to embrace the rawness of her "untaught" emotions.

## Addressed to Sensibility

Oh! Sensibility! Thou busy nurse  
Of injuries once received, why wilt thou feed  
Those serpents in the soul? their stings more fell<sup>o</sup>  
Than those which writhed round Priam's priestly  
son;<sup>1</sup>

5 I feel them here! They rend my panting breast,  
But I will tear them thence: ah! effort vain!  
Disturbed they grow rapacious, while their fangs  
Strike at poor Memory; wounded she deplores  
Her ravished joys and murmurs o'er the past.

10 Why shrinks my soul within these prison<sup>2</sup> walls  
Where wretches shake their chains? III-fated youth,<sup>3</sup>  
Why does thine eye run wildly o'er my form,  
Pointed with fond enquiry? 'Tis not *me*  
Thy restless thought would find; the silent tear  
Steals gently down his cheek: ah! could my arms  
15 Afford thee refuge, I would bear thee hence  
To a more peaceful dwelling. Vain the wish!  
Thy powers are all unhinged, and thou wouldst sit  
Insensible to sympathy: farewell.  
Lamented being! ever lost to hope,  
20 I leave thee, yea despair myself of cure.

For, oh, my bosom bleeds, while griefs like thine  
Increase the recent pang. Pensive I rove,  
More wounded than the hart,<sup>o</sup> whose side yet holds  
The deadly arrow: friendship, boast no more  
25 Thy hoard of joys, o'er which my soul oft hung;  
Like the too anxious miser o'er his gold.  
My treasures are all wrecked; I quit the scene



Where haughty insult cut the sacred ties  
Which long had held us: Cruel Julius!<sup>4</sup> take  
30 My last adieu. The wound thou gav'st is death,  
Nor canst e'en thou recall<sup>o</sup> my frightened sense  
With friendship's pleasing sound; yet while I clasp  
Thy valued image to my aching mind,  
And viewing that, forgive thee; will deplore  
35 The blow that severed two congenial souls!

Officious<sup>o</sup> Sensibility! 'tis thine<sup>5</sup>  
To give the finest anguish, to dissolve  
The dross<sup>o</sup> of spirit, till all essence, she  
Refines on real woe; from thence extracts  
40 Sad unexisting phantoms, never seen.

Yet, dear ideal mourner, be thou near  
When on Lysander's<sup>6</sup> tears I silent gaze;  
Then, with thy viewless pencil,<sup>o</sup> form his sigh,  
His deepest groan, his sorrow-tinged thought,  
45 With immature impatience, cold despair  
With all the tort'ring images that play,  
In sable hue, within his wasted mind.

And when this dreary group shall meet my  
thought,  
Oh! throw my pow'rs upon a fertile space,  
50 Where mingles ev'ry varied soft relief.  
Without thee, I could offer but the dregs  
Of vulgar consolation; from her cup  
He turns the eye, nor dare it soil his lip!  
Raise thou my friendly hand; mix thou the draught  
55 More pure than ether, as ambrosia clear,  
Fit only for the soul; thy chalice fill  
With drops of sympathy, which swiftly fall  
From my afflicted heart: yet—yet beware,  
Nor stoop to seize from passion's warmer clime

60 A poisonous sweet.—Bright cherub, safely rove  
 Through all the deep recesses of the soul!  
 Float on her raptures, deeper tinge her woes,  
 Strengthen emotion, higher waft her sigh,  
 Sit in the tearful orb, and ardent gaze  
 65 On joy or sorrow. But thy empire ends  
 Within the line of SPIRIT. My rough soul,  
 O Sensibility! defenseless hails  
 Thy feelings most acute. Yet, ye who boast  
 Of bliss *I* ne'er must reach, ye, who can fix<sup>o</sup>  
 70 A rule for sentiment, if rules there are,  
 (For much I doubt, my friends, if rule e'er held  
 Capacious sentiment) ye sure can point  
 My mind to joys that never touched the heart.  
 What is this joy? Where does its essence rest?  
 75 Ah! self-confounding sophists,<sup>z</sup> will ye dare  
 Pronounce *that* joy which never touched the heart?<sup>8</sup>  
 Does education give the transport keen,  
 Or swell your vaunted grief? No, Nature feels  
 Most poignant, undefended, hails with me  
 80 The Powers of Sensibility untaught.

## Endnotes

1787

- Note 1: In Greek mythology, Laocoön, a Trojan priest in some stories called the son of King Priam of Troy, was attacked along with his two sons by giant snakes; the scene was depicted by many painters and sculptors.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Bedlam [*Yearsley's note*]. The common name for Bethlehem Hospital in London (founded 1247), in which the mentally ill were confined in the 18th century.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A male patient in the asylum.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Another unidentified male figure in the poem.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Sensibility, it is your role or duty.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A common pastoral name that may refer to a character crossed in love in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595/6).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Incompetent philosophers whose arguments contradict themselves.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Will you give the name "joy" to something that cannot affect the heart?[Return to reference 8](#)

## Notes

- °: *painful, deadly*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *male deer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bring back*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *interfering, intrusive*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dregs, impurities*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *invisible paintbrush*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *establish*[Return to reference °](#)

## FRANCES BURNEY

### 1752–1840

In the early twentieth century, Virginia Woolf described Frances Burney as “the mother of English fiction.” Burney herself also rightly emphasized the originality of her work. At the age of twenty-six, she pitched the idea for her first novel, *Evelina* (1778), to the bookseller who would publish it: “I believe it has not before been executed, though it seems a fair field open for the Novelist.” Yet, Burney’s claim for the novel’s originality—in the letter to the bookseller and, more cautiously yet palpably, at the end of the novel’s preface—also relies on her deep understanding of her distinguished predecessors in novel writing. *Evelina* is an epistolary novel (presented as a series of letters), a form influentially employed in Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747–48) as a way to depict characters’ emotions at the very moment they write, in the midst of the plot, not knowing the outcome. But Burney combines a Richardsonian moral sensibility with a bright comic vein evident in some of the other predecessors her preface cites, like Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett. Burney’s writing crackles with humor and can be relentless in satirically exposing bad manners or a selfish heart.

Burney did not divulge her identity to that bookseller, nor confide in anybody except two siblings and a cousin about the composition of the novel, nor put her name on the title page when the book appeared. Only after its publication did delighted readers, including Samuel Johnson, Hester Thrale, and her father Charles Burney, find

her out and sing her praises. Burney's father was a popular teacher and historian of music, and her family's London social circle included famous writers, actors, and musicians. Though she was shy and not encouraged by her father as much as her sisters, Burney educated herself and honed her intellect and observational skill among this cultured elite. She also learned the book business by helping her father prepare his own work for the press. As a teenager, she had drafted a version (now lost) of *Evelina's* backstory. Her first novel features, as *Evelina's* subtitle explains, "a young lady's entrance into the world," that is, the world of London high society. *Evelina*, a beautiful ingénue from the country, stumbles in learning the codes that govern conduct at public resorts and private parties and that shape taste, desire, and love. The selections reprinted here occur early in the novel, when *Evelina* first encounters London social life and learns, to her cost, how rules of politeness can serve as vehicles for aggression. It may be tempting to draw parallels between Burney's inexperienced first heroine and Burney herself at her literary debut—as the novel's preface and other introductory material encourage—but such parallels only go so far. Though *Evelina* widened Burney's acquaintance and buoyed her confidence with praise from powerful advocates, she did not begin her career artlessly and seemed to comprehend her own genius from the beginning. For the rest of her career as the most formidable English novelist of the late eighteenth century, Burney would continue to test the novel's range, dropping the epistolary style for a detached, sometimes severe, third-person narrator. *Cecilia* (1782) expanded her satirical and sentimental scope to present the fashionable world of London as a kind of wasteland; the immensely popular *Camilla* (1796) again mixed comedy and romantic feeling to portray the trials in love and life of a family's siblings; and her final novel, *The Wanderer* (1814), explored the possibilities of historical fiction, employing Gothic touches against a background of the French Revolution.

Burney's home life was tumultuous. She and her stepmother disliked each other, and Burney fell in love with a young clergyman

who never got around to proposing. In 1786, to please her father, she accepted a place as a lady-in-waiting at court, where the paralyzing etiquette and lack of independence tormented her for the next five years, until she finally managed to resign. At forty-one she married a French émigré, General Alexandre-Gabriel-Jean-Baptiste d'Arblay. Despite the disapproval of her father—d'Arblay was penniless, Catholic, and politically liberal—the marriage was happy. Madame d'Arblay soon bore a son, and her fictions brought in good money. After she joined her husband in France, in 1802, the Napoleonic Wars prevented them from returning to England for ten years.

Burney never stopped writing—not only novels and plays but perpetual letters and journals, recording whatever she saw for friends and family as well as herself. These diaries and letters, edited after her death by a niece, made her famous again in the nineteenth century. Even the most informal pages display Burney's gifts: a knack for catching character, a wonderful ear for dialogue, wry humor, and a swift pace that carries the reader along from moment to moment. Her special subject is embarrassment—often her own. Her clear-eyed view of the world can also be incredibly painful, as in her gripping account of a mastectomy. In her first journal entry, she frees herself to write with utter honesty by pretending that nobody is going to read her. But her private thoughts are reported so fully and faithfully that, in the end, every reader can share them.

## ***From Evelina***[1](#)

### **Endnotes**

- Note 1: The complete title on the title page is *Evelina, or, A Young Lady's Entrance into the World, in a Series of Letters*.[Return to reference 1](#)

## ***Preface***

In the republic of letters, there is no member of such inferior rank, or who is so much disdained by his brethren of the quill,<sup>2</sup> as the humble novelist: nor is his fate less hard in the world at large, since, among the whole class of writers, perhaps not one can be named of which the votaries are more numerous but less respectable.

Yet, while in the annals of those few of our predecessors, to whom this species of writing is indebted for being saved from contempt, and rescued from depravity, we can trace such names as Rousseau, Johnson,<sup>3</sup> Marivaux, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett, no man need blush at starting from the same post, though many, nay, most men, may sigh at finding themselves distanced.<sup>4</sup>

The following letters are presented to the public—for such, by novel writers, novel readers will be called,—with a very singular mixture of timidity and confidence, resulting from the peculiar situation of the editor,<sup>5</sup> who, though trembling for their success from a consciousness of their imperfections, yet fears not being involved in their disgrace, while happily wrapped up in a mantle of impenetrable obscurity.

To draw characters from nature, though not from life,<sup>6</sup> and to mark the manners of the times, is the attempted plan of the following letters. For this purpose, a young female, educated in the most secluded retirement, makes, at the age of seventeen, her first appearance upon the great and busy stage of life; with a virtuous mind, a cultivated understanding, and a feeling heart, her ignorance of the forms,<sup>7</sup> and inexperience in the manners of the world, occasion all the little incidents which these volumes record, and which form the natural progression of the life of a young woman of obscure birth, but conspicuous beauty, for the first six months after her *entrance into the world*.

Perhaps were it possible to effect the total extirpation of novels, our young ladies in general, and boarding-school damsels in particular, might profit from their annihilation; but since the



distemper they have spread seems incurable, since their contagion bids defiance to the medicine of advice or reprehension, and since they are found to baffle all the mental art of physic, save what is prescribed by the slow regimen of time, and bitter diet of experience, surely all attempts to contribute to the number of those which may be read, if not with advantage, at least without injury, ought rather to be encouraged than contemned.

Let me, therefore, prepare for disappointment those who, in the perusal of these sheets, entertain the gentle expectation of being transported to the fantastic regions of romance, where fiction is colored by all the gay tints of luxurious imagination, where reason is an outcast, and where the sublimity of the *marvelous* rejects all aid from sober probability. The heroine of these memoirs, young, artless, and inexperienced, is

No faultless Monster that the world ne'er saw;<sup>8</sup>

but the offspring of nature, and of nature in her simplest attire.

In all the arts, the value of copies can only be proportioned to the scarceness of originals: among sculptors and painters, a fine statue, or a beautiful picture, of some great master, may deservedly employ the imitative talents of younger and inferior artists, that their appropriation to one spot may not wholly prevent the more general expansion of their excellence;<sup>9</sup> but, among authors, the reverse is the case, since the noblest productions of literature are almost equally attainable with the meanest. In books, therefore, imitation cannot be shunned too sedulously; for the very perfection of a model which is frequently seen, serves but more forcibly to mark the inferiority of a copy.

To avoid what is common, without adopting what is unnatural, must limit the ambition of the vulgar herd of authors: however zealous, therefore, my veneration of the great writers I have mentioned, however I may feel myself enlightened by the knowledge of Johnson, charmed with the eloquence of Rousseau,

softened by the pathetic<sup>1</sup> powers of Richardson, and exhilarated by the wit of Fielding and humor of Smollett, I yet presume not to attempt pursuing the same ground which they have tracked; whence, though they may have cleared the weeds, they have also culled the flowers, and, though they have rendered the path plain, they have left it barren.

The candor of my readers I have not the impertinence to doubt, and to their indulgence I am sensible I have no claim; I have, therefore, only to entreat, that my own words may not pronounce my condemnation; and that what I have here ventured to say in regard to imitation, may be understood, as it is meant, in a general sense, and not be imputed to an opinion of my own originality, which I have not the vanity, the folly, or the blindness, to entertain.

Whatever may be the fate of these letters, the editor is satisfied they will meet with justice; and commits them to the press, though hopeless of fame, yet not regardless of censure.

## Endnotes

- Note 2: Fellow writers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:  
However superior the capacities in which these great writers deserve to be considered, they must pardon me that, for the dignity of my subject, I here rank the authors of *Rasselas* and *Eloise* as Novelists [*Burney's note*]. Burney refers to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), French philosopher and author of the novel *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1761), along with Samuel Johnson (see *Rasselas*, [p. 802](#)). Filling out her list of respectable novelists are Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux (1688–1763), Henry Fielding (see [p. 689](#)), Samuel Richardson (see [p. 692](#)), and Scottish writer Tobias Smollett (1721–1771).  
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Outrun. "Post": starting line.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Burney strikes the Richardsonian pose as "editor" of the letters composing *Evelina*, though she also acknowledges that

they and the characters who wrote them are fictional.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: *Evelina's* characters represent human nature but not real people.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Etiquette, rules of behavior.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, *An Essay upon Poetry* (1682), line 235.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: So that the master's single copy will not confine his talent to a single place.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Passionately moving.[Return to reference 1](#)

## ***Volume I, Letter VIII***

**EVELINA TO THE REV. MR. VILLARS.**<sup>1</sup>

Howard Grove, March 26.

This house seems to be the house of joy; every face wears a smile, and a laugh is at everybody's service. It is quite amusing to walk about, and see the general confusion; a room leading to the garden is fitting up for Captain Mirvan's study.<sup>2</sup> Lady Howard does not sit a moment in a place; Miss Mirvan is making caps; everybody so busy!—such flying from room to room!—so many orders given, and retracted, and given again!—Nothing but hurry and perturbation.

Well but my dear Sir, I am desired to make a request to you. I hope you will not think me an encroacher; Lady Howard insists upon my writing!—Yet I hardly know how to go on; a petition implies a want,—and have you left me one? No, indeed.

I am half ashamed of myself for beginning this letter. But these dear ladies are so pressing—I cannot, for my life, resist wishing for the pleasures they offer me,—provided you do not disapprove them.

They are to make a very short stay in town.<sup>3</sup> The Captain will meet them in a day or two. Mrs. Mirvan and her sweet daughter both go;—what a happy party! Yet, I am not *very* eager to accompany them: at least, I shall be contented to remain where I am, if you desire that I should.

Assured, my dearest Sir, of your goodness, your bounty, and your indulgent kindness, ought I to form a wish that has not your sanction? Decide for me, therefore, without the least apprehension that I shall be uneasy, or discontented. While I am yet in suspense, perhaps I may *hope*, but I am most certain, that when you have once determined, I shall not repine.

They tell me that London is now in full splendor. Two playhouses are open,—the Opera-House,—Ranelagh,—and the Pantheon.<sup>4</sup>—You see I have learned all their names. However, pray don't suppose that I make any point of going, for I shall hardly sigh to see them depart

without me; though I shall probably never meet with such another opportunity. And, indeed, their domestic happiness will be so great,—it is natural to wish to partake of it.

I believe I am bewitched! I made a resolution when I began, that I would not be urgent; but my pen—or rather my thoughts, will not suffer me to keep it—for I acknowledge, I must acknowledge, I cannot help wishing for your permission.

I almost repent already that I have made this confession; pray forget that you have read it, if this journey is displeasing to you. But I will not write any longer; for the more I think of this affair, the less indifferent to it I find myself.

Adieu, my most honored, most revered, most beloved father! For by what other name can I call you? I have no happiness or sorrow, no hope or fear, but what your kindness bestows, or your displeasure may cause. You will not, I am sure, send a refusal without reasons unanswerable, and therefore I shall cheerfully acquiesce. Yet I hope—I hope you will be able to permit me to go! I am, with the utmost affection, gratitude, and duty, your

EVELINA ———

I cannot to *you* sign *Anville*,<sup>5</sup> and what other name may I claim?

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Early in volume 1, Evelina, wide-eyed and naive, recounts her experiences as she travels away from her guardian, Reverend Arthur Villars, and the quiet home in Berry Hill, in Dorsetshire, where he raised her. She writes, first, from Howard Grove in Kent, home of family friend Lady Howard, her daughter Mrs. Mirvan, and her granddaughter Miss Maria Mirvan (Evelina's friend).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The women prepare for Captain Mirvan's return to England after seven years away. Mrs. and Miss Mirvan (his wife and daughter) plan to meet him in London briefly before returning with him to Howard Grove.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Stately building hosting assemblies and concerts.  
“Ranelagh”: public pleasure gardens. Evelina lists London’s most fashionable places of entertainment.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Villars has invented the surname Anville to help Evelina prevent questions about her past, though her real paternity is a key plot point.[Return to reference 5](#)

## ***Volume I, Letter IX***

**MR. VILLARS TO EVELINA.**

Berry-Hill, March 28.

To resist the urgency of entreaty is a power which I have not yet acquired: I aim not at an authority which deprives you of liberty, yet I would fain guide myself by a prudence which should save me the pangs of repentance. Your impatience to fly to a place which your imagination has painted to you in colors so attractive surprises me not; I have only to hope that the liveliness of your fancy may not deceive you: to refuse, would be raising it still higher. To see my Evelina happy is to see myself without a wish: go then my child; and may that Heaven, which alone can, direct, preserve, and strengthen you! To that, my love, will I daily offer prayers for your felicity; O may it guard, watch over you! Defend you from danger, save you from distress, and keep vice as distant from your person as from your heart! And to me, may it grant the ultimate blessing of closing these aged eyes in the arms of one so dear—so deservedly beloved!

ARTHUR VILLARS

## ***Volume I, Letter X***

**EVELINA TO THE REV. MR. VILLARS.**

Queen-Ann-Street, London,<sup>6</sup> Saturday, April 2.

This moment arrived. Just going to Drury-Lane theatre. The celebrated Mr. Garrick performs *Ranger*.<sup>7</sup> I am quite in ecstasy. So is Miss Mirvan. How fortunate, that he should happen to play! We would not let Mrs. Mirvan rest till she consented to go; her chief objection was to our dress, for we have had no time to *Londonize* ourselves; but we teased her into compliance, and so we are to sit in some obscure place, that she may not be seen. As to me, I should be alike unknown in the most conspicuous or most private part of the house.

I can write no more now. I have hardly time to breathe—only just this, the houses and streets are not quite so superb as I expected. However, I have seen nothing yet, so I ought not to judge.

Well, adieu, my dearest Sir, for the present; I could not forbear writing a few words instantly on my arrival; though I suppose my letter of thanks for your consent is still on the road.

Saturday Night.

O my dear Sir, in what raptures am I returned! Well may Mr. Garrick be so celebrated, so universally admired—I had not any idea of so great a performer.

Such ease! such vivacity in his manner! such grace in his motions! such fire and meaning in his eyes!—I could hardly believe he had studied a written part, for every word seemed to be uttered from the impulse of the moment.

His action—at once so graceful and so free!—his voice—so clear, so melodious, yet so wonderfully various in its tones!—such animation!—Every look *speaks*!

I would have given the world to have had the whole play acted over again. And when he danced—O how I envied Clarinda!<sup>8</sup> I



almost wished to have jumped on the stage and joined them.

I am afraid you will think me mad, so I won't say any more; yet, I really believe Mr. Garrick would make you mad too, if you could see him. I intend to ask Mrs. Mirvan to go to the play every night while we stay in town. She is extremely kind to me, and Maria, her charming daughter, is the sweetest girl in the world.

I shall write to you every evening all that passes in the day, and that in the same manner as, if I could see, I should tell you.

Sunday.

This morning we went to Portland chapel, and afterwards we walked in the mall of St. James's Park,<sup>9</sup> which by no means answered my expectations: it is a long straight walk, of dirty gravel, very uneasy to the feet; and at each end, instead of an open prospect, nothing is to be seen but houses built of brick. When Mrs. Mirvan pointed out the Palace<sup>1</sup> to me—I think I was never much more surprised.

However, the walk was very agreeable to us; everybody looked gay, and seemed pleased, and the ladies were so much dressed, that Miss Mirvan and I could do nothing but look at them. Mrs. Mirvan met several of her friends. No wonder, for I never saw so many people assembled together before. I looked about for some of *my* acquaintance, but in vain, for I saw not one person that I knew, which is very odd, for all the world seemed there.

Mrs. Mirvan says we are not to walk in the park again next Sunday, even if we should be in town, because there is better company in Kensington Gardens.<sup>2</sup> But really if you had seen how much every body was dressed, you would not think that possible.

Monday.

We are to go this evening to a private ball, given by Mrs. Stanley, a very fashionable lady of Mrs. Mirvan's acquaintance.

We have been *a-shopping*, as Mrs. Mirvan calls it, all this morning, to buy silks, caps, gauzes, and so forth.

The shops are really very entertaining, especially the mercers;<sup>3</sup> there seem to be six or seven men belonging to each shop, and

every one took care, by bowing and smirking, to be noticed; we were conducted from one to another, and carried from room to room, with so much ceremony, that at first I was almost afraid to go on.

I thought I should never have chosen a silk, for they produced so many I knew not which to fix upon, and they recommended them all so strongly, that I fancy they thought I only wanted persuasion to buy every thing they showed me. And, indeed, they took so much trouble, that I was almost ashamed I could not.

At the milliners, the ladies we met were so much dressed, that I should rather have imagined they were making visits than purchases. But what most diverted me was, that we were more frequently served by men than by women; and such men! so finical, so affected! They seemed to understand every part of a woman's dress better than we do ourselves; and they recommended caps and ribbands with an air of so much importance, that I wished to ask them how long they had left off wearing them!<sup>4</sup>





**"Ridiculous Taste, or the Ladies Absurdity,"** 1771, Matthias (or Matthew) Darly. This print satirizes fashionable hairdos worn by upper-class women, which, according to social commentators, had grown to extreme proportions. The hairdresser ascends a



ladder to complete his work, while the lady's husband uses a sextant to measure its altitude.

---

The dispatch with which they work in these great shops is amazing, for they have promised me a complete suit of linen against<sup>5</sup> the evening.

I have just had my hair dressed. You can't think how oddly my head feels; full of powder and black pins, and a great cushion on the top of it.<sup>6</sup> I believe you would hardly know me, for my face looks quite different to what it did before my hair was dressed. When I shall be able to make use of a comb for myself I cannot tell, for my hair is so much entangled, *frizzled* they call it, that I fear it will be very difficult.

I am half afraid of this ball tonight, for, you know, I have never danced but at school; however, Miss Mirvan says there is nothing in it. Yet, I wish it was over.

Adieu, my dear Sir; pray excuse the wretched stuff I write, perhaps I may improve by being in this town, and then my letters will be less unworthy your reading. Meantime, I am, your dutiful and affectionate, though unpolished,

EVELINA.

Poor Miss Mirvan cannot wear one of the caps she made, because they dress her hair too large for them.

## Endnotes

- Note 6: The residence rented by the Mirvan family on Queen Anne Street was in a fashionable district in the west of London, now called Marylebone.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: David Garrick was the most influential actor of the period and also a manager of the Drury Lane Theatre in London. Ranger is the lead character in Benjamin Hoadly's comedy *The Suspicious Husband* (1747), one of Garrick's signature roles.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: A character in *The Suspicious Husband*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A fashionable walk in St. James's Park in central London. "Portland chapel": a chapel near where the Mirvan family was staying.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: St. James's Palace, located close to the Mall of St. James's Park, was then the primary London home of the royals. (Buckingham House was also nearby and might loosely be called a palace, but it was not yet built up into the current form of Buckingham Palace.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Another fashionable park in London.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sellers of fine fabrics.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Had stopped wearing them themselves. Commentators in the period sometimes depicted commerce as feminizing or remarked that commercial activity could throw conventional gender roles into confusion.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: To be ready for.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Women's hairstyles had gotten increasingly—sometimes extravagantly—elaborate and large. Period satirical prints showed women dwarfed or toppled by their towering hair.[Return to reference 6](#)

## ***Volume I, Letter XI***

### **EVELINA IN CONTINUATION.**

Queen-Ann-Street, April 5, Tuesday morning.

I have a vast deal to say, and shall give all this morning to my pen. As to my plan of writing every evening the adventures of the day, I find it impracticable; for the diversions here are so very late, that if I begin my letters after them, I could not go to bed at all.

We passed a most extraordinary evening. A *private* ball this was called, so I expected to have seen about four or five couple; but Lord! my dear Sir, I believe I saw half the world! Two very large rooms were full of company; in one were cards for the elderly ladies, and in the other were the dancers. My mamma Mirvan, for she always calls me her child, said she would sit with Maria and me till we were provided with partners, and then join the card-players.

The gentlemen, as they passed and re-passed, looked as if they thought we were quite at their disposal, and only waiting for the honor of their commands; and they sauntered about, in a careless indolent manner, as if with a view to keep us in suspense. I don't speak of this in regard to Miss Mirvan and myself only, but to the ladies in general: and I thought it so provoking, that I determined in my own mind that, far from humoring such airs, I would rather not dance at all, than with any one who would seem to think me ready to accept the first partner who would condescend to take me.

Not long after, a young man, who had for some time looked at us with a kind of negligent impertinence, advanced, on tiptoe, towards me; he had a set smile on his face, and his dress was so foppish, that I really believed he even wished to be stared at; and yet he was very ugly.

Bowing almost to the ground with a sort of swing, and waving his hand with the greatest conceit, after a short and silly pause, he said, "Madam—may I presume?"—and stopped, offering to take my hand. I drew it back, but could scarce forbear laughing. "Allow me,

Madam," (continued he, affectedly breaking off every half moment), "the honor and happiness—if I am not so unhappy as to address you too late—to have the happiness and honor—"

Again he would have taken my hand, but bowing my head, I begged to be excused, and turned to Miss Mirvan to conceal my laughter. He then desired to know if I had already engaged myself to some more fortunate man? I said No, and that I believed I should not dance at all. He would keep himself, he told me, disengaged, in hopes I should relent; and then, uttering some ridiculous speeches of sorrow and disappointment, though his face still wore the same invariable smile, he retreated.

It so happened, as we have since recollected, that during this little dialogue, Mrs. Mirvan was conversing with the lady of the house. And very soon after, another gentleman, who seemed about six-and-twenty years old, gaily but not foppishly dressed, and indeed extremely handsome, with an air of mixed politeness and gallantry, desired to know if I was engaged, or would honor him with my hand. So he was pleased to say, though I am sure I know not what honor he could receive from me; but these sort of expressions, I find, are used as words of course,<sup>7</sup> without any distinction of persons, or study of propriety.

Well, I bowed, and I am sure I colored; for indeed I was frightened at the thoughts of dancing before so many people, all strangers, and, which was worse, *with* a stranger; however, that was unavoidable, for though I looked round the room several times, I could not see one person that I knew. And so he took my hand, and led me to join in the dance.

The minuets were over<sup>8</sup> before we arrived, for we were kept late by the milliner's making us wait for our things.

He seemed very desirous of entering into conversation with me; but I was seized with such a panic, that I could hardly speak a word, and nothing but the shame of so soon changing my mind prevented my returning to my seat, and declining to dance at all.

He appeared to be surprised at my terror, which I believe was but too apparent: however, he asked no questions, though I fear he

must think it very strange; for I did not choose to tell him it was owing to my never before dancing but with a school-girl.

His conversation was sensible and spirited; his air and address were open and noble; his manners gentle, attentive, and infinitely engaging; his person is all elegance, and his countenance, the most animated and expressive I have ever seen.

In a short time we were joined by Miss Mirvan, who stood next couple to us. But how I was startled when she whispered me that my partner was a nobleman! This gave me a new alarm; how will he be provoked, thought I, when he finds what a simple rustic<sup>9</sup> he has honored with his choice! one whose ignorance of the world makes her perpetually fear doing something wrong!

That he should be so much my superior in every way quite disconcerted me; and you will suppose my spirits were not much raised, when I heard a lady, in passing us, say, "This is the most difficult dance I ever saw."

"O dear, then," cried Maria to her partner, "with your leave, I'll sit down till the next."

"So will I too, then," cried I, "for I am sure I can hardly stand."

"But you must speak to your partner first," answered she; for he had turned aside to talk with some gentlemen. However, I had not sufficient courage to address him, and so away we all three tripped,<sup>1</sup> and seated ourselves at another end of the room.

But, unfortunately for me, Miss Mirvan soon after suffered herself to be prevailed upon to attempt the dance; and just as she rose to go, she cried, "My dear, yonder is your partner, Lord Orville, walking about the room in search of you."

"Don't leave me then, dear girl!" cried I; but she was obliged to go. And now I was more uneasy than ever; I would have given the world to have seen Mrs. Mirvan, and begged of her to make my apologies; for what, thought I, can I possibly say to him in excuse for running away? He must either conclude me a fool, or half mad; for any one brought up in the great world, and accustomed to its ways, can have no idea of such sort of fears as mine.



My confusion increased when I observed that he was everywhere seeking me, with apparent perplexity and surprise; but when, at last, I saw him move towards the place where I sat, I was ready to sink with shame and distress. I found it absolutely impossible to keep my seat, because I could not think of a word to say for myself, and so I rose, and walked hastily towards the card-room, resolving to stay with Mrs. Mirvan the rest of the evening, and not to dance at all. But before I could find her, Lord Orville saw and approached me.

He begged to know if I was not well? You may easily imagine how much I was embarrassed. I made no answer; but hung my head like a fool, and looked on my fan.

He then, with an air the most respectfully serious, asked if he had been so unhappy as to offend me?

"No, indeed!" cried I, and, in hopes of changing the discourse, and preventing his further inquiries, I desired to know if he had seen the young lady who had been conversing with me?

No;—but would I honor him with any commands to her?

"O, by no means!"

Was there any other person with whom I wished to speak?

I said *no*, before I knew I had answered at all.

Should he have the pleasure of bringing me any refreshment?

I bowed, almost involuntarily. And away he flew.

I was quite ashamed of being so troublesome, and so much *above* myself as these seeming airs made me appear; but indeed I was too much confused to think or act with any consistency.

If he had not been swift as lightning, I don't know whether I should not have stolen away again; but he returned in a moment. When I had drank a glass of lemonade, he hoped, he said, that I would again honor him with my hand, as a new dance was just begun. I had not the presence of mind to say a single word, and so I let him once more lead me to the place I had left.

Shocked to find how silly, how childish a part I had acted, my former fears of dancing before such a company, and with such a partner, returned more forcibly than ever. I suppose he perceived my uneasiness, for he entreated me to sit down again, if dancing was

disagreeable to me. But I was quite satisfied with the folly I had already shown; and therefore declined his offer, though I was really scarce able to stand.

Under such conscious disadvantages, you may easily imagine, my dear Sir, how ill I acquitted myself. But, though I both expected and deserved to find him very much mortified and displeased at his ill fortune in the choice he had made, yet, to my very great relief, he appeared to be even contented, and very much assisted and encouraged me. These people in high life have too much presence of mind, I believe, to *seem* disconcerted, or out of humor, however they may feel: for had I been the person of the most consequence in the room, I could not have met with more attention and respect.

When the dance was over, seeing me still very much flurried, he led me to a seat, saying that he would not suffer me to fatigue myself from politeness.

And then, if my capacity, or even if my spirits had been better, in how animated a conversation I might have been engaged! It was then I saw that the rank of Lord Orville was his least recommendation, his understanding and his manners being far more distinguished. His remarks upon the company in general were so apt, so just, so lively, I am almost surprised myself that they did not reanimate me; but indeed I was too well convinced of the ridiculous part I had myself played before so nice<sup>2</sup> an observer, to be able to enjoy his pleasantry: so self-compassion gave me feeling for others. Yet I had not the courage to attempt either to defend them or to rally in my turn, but listened to him in silent embarrassment.

When he found this, he changed the subject, and talked of public places, and public performers; but he soon discovered that I was totally ignorant of them.

He then, very ingeniously, turned the discourse to the amusements and occupations of the country.

It now struck me that he was resolved to try whether or not I was capable of talking upon *any* subject. This put so great a constraint upon my thoughts, that I was unable to go further than a monosyllable, and not ever so far, when I could possibly avoid it.

We were sitting in this manner, he conversing with all gaiety, I looking down with all foolishness, when that fop who had first asked me to dance, with a most ridiculous solemnity approached, and, after a profound bow or two, said, "I humbly beg pardon, Madam,—and of you too, my Lord,—for breaking in upon such agreeable conversation—which must, doubtless, be much more delectable—than what I have the honor to offer—but—"

I interrupted him—I blush for my folly—with laughing; yet I could not help it; for, added to the man's stately foppishness, (and he actually took snuff between every three words) when I looked round at Lord Orville, I saw such extreme surprise in his face,—the cause of which appeared so absurd, that I could not for my life preserve my gravity.

I had not laughed before from the time I had left Miss Mirvan, and I had much better have cried then; Lord Orville actually stared at me; the beau, I know not his name, looked quite enraged. "Refrain—Madam," (said he, with an important air) "a few moments refrain!—I have but a sentence to trouble you with.—May I know to what accident I must attribute not having the honor of your hand?"

"Accident, Sir!" repeated I, much astonished.

"Yes, accident, Madam—for surely,—I must take the liberty to observe—pardon me, Madam,—it ought to be no common one—that should tempt a lady—so young a one too,—to be guilty of ill-manners."

A confused idea now for the first time entered my head, of something I had heard of the rules of an assembly; but I was never at one before—I have only danced at school—and so giddy and heedless I was, that I had not once considered the impropriety of refusing one partner, and afterwards accepting another. I was thunderstruck at the recollection: but, while these thoughts were rushing into my head, Lord Orville, with some warmth, said, "This lady, Sir, is incapable of meriting such an accusation!"

The creature—for I am very angry with him—made a low bow and with a grin the most malicious I ever saw, "My Lord," said he,

"far be it from me to *accuse* the lady, for having the discernment to distinguish and prefer—the superior attractions of your Lordship."

Again he bowed, and walked off.

Was ever any thing so provoking? I was ready to die with shame. "What a coxcomb!" exclaimed Lord Orville: while I, without knowing what I did, rose hastily, and moving off, "I can't imagine," cried I, "where Mrs. Mirvan has hid herself!"

"Give me leave to see," answered he. I bowed and sat down again, not daring to meet his eyes; for what must he think of me, between my blunder, and the supposed preference?

He returned in a moment, and told me that Mrs. Mirvan was at cards, but would be glad to see me; and I went immediately. There was but one chair vacant, so, to my great relief, Lord Orville presently left us. I then told Mrs. Mirvan my disasters, and she good-naturedly blamed herself for not having better instructed me, but said she had taken it for granted that I must know such common customs. However, the man may, I think, be satisfied with his pretty speech, and carry his resentment no farther.

In a short time, Lord Orville returned. I consented, with the best grace I could, to go down another dance, for I had had time to recollect myself; and therefore resolved to use some exertion, and, if possible, to appear less a fool than I had hitherto done; for it occurred to me, that, insignificant as I was, compared to a man of his rank and figure, yet, since he had been so unfortunate as to make choice of me for a partner, why I should endeavor to make the best of it.

The dance, however, was short, and he spoke very little; so I had no opportunity of putting my resolution in practice. He was satisfied, I suppose, with his former successful efforts to draw me out; or, rather, I fancied he had been inquiring *who I was*. This again disconcerted me, and the spirits I had determined to exert, again failed me. Tired, ashamed, and mortified, I begged to sit down till we returned home, which we did soon after. Lord Orville did me the honor to hand me to the coach, talking all the way of the honor *I* had done *him*! O these fashionable people!

Well, my dear Sir, was it not a strange evening? I could not help being thus particular, because, to me, every thing is so new. But it is now time to conclude. I am, with all love and duty, your

EVELINA

## Endnotes

- Note 7: Formulaic phrases.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Balls often began with minuets, rather formal and difficult dances, and then usually gave way to less demanding country dances.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Country girl.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Stepped lightly.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Exact.[Return to reference 2](#)

## ***Volume I, Letter XII***

### **EVELINA IN CONTINUATION.**

Tuesday, April 5.

There is to be no end to the troubles of last night. I have this moment, between persuasion and laughter, gathered from Maria the most curious dialogue that ever I heard. You will, at first, be startled at my vanity; but, my dear Sir, have patience!

It must have passed while I was sitting with Mrs. Mirvan, in the card-room. Maria was taking some refreshment, and saw Lord Orville advancing for the same purpose himself; but he did not know her, though she immediately recollected him. Presently after, a very gay-looking man, stepping hastily up to him cried, "Why, my Lord, what have you done with your lovely partner?"

"*Nothing!*" answered Lord Orville, with a smile and a shrug.

"By Jove," cried the man, "she is the most beautiful creature I ever saw in my life!"

Lord Orville, as he well might, laughed, but answered, "Yes, a pretty modest-looking girl."

"O my Lord!" cried the madman, "she is an angel!"

"A *silent* one," returned he.

"Why ay, my Lord, how stands she as to that? She looks all intelligence and expression."

"A poor weak girl!" answered Lord Orville, shaking his head.

"By Jove," cried the other, "I am glad to hear it!"

At that moment, the same odious creature who had been my former tormentor joined them. Addressing Lord Orville with great respect, he said, "I beg pardon, my Lord,—if I was—as I fear might be the case—rather too severe in my censure of the lady who is honored with your protection—but, my Lord, ill-breeding is apt to provoke a man."

"Ill-breeding!" cried my unknown champion, "impossible! that elegant face can never be so vile a mask!"

"O Sir, as to that," answered he, "you must allow *me* to judge; for though I pay all deference to your opinion—in other things,—yet I hope you will grant—and I appeal to your Lordship also—that I am not totally despicable as a judge of good or ill-manners."

"I was so wholly ignorant," said Lord Orville, gravely, "of the provocation you might have had, that I could not but be surprised at your singular resentment."

"It was far from my intention," answered he, "to offend your Lordship; but, really, for a person who is nobody, to give herself such airs,—I own I could not command my passions. For, my Lord, though I have made diligent inquiry—I cannot learn who she is."

"By what I can make out," cried my defender, "she must be a country parson's daughter."

"He! he! he! very good, 'pon honor!" cried the fop,—"well, so I could have sworn by her manners."

And then, delighted at his own wit, he laughed, and went away, as I suppose, to repeat it.

Full p. C-1055 Shorter p. 1513

"But what the deuce is all this?" demanded the other.

"Why a very foolish affair," answered Lord Orville; "your Helen<sup>3</sup> first refused this coxcomb, and then—danced with me. This is all I can gather of it."

"O, Orville," returned he, "you are a happy man!—But *ill-bred*?—I can never believe it! And she looks too sensible to be *ignorant*."

"Whether ignorant or mischievous, I will not pretend to determine, but certain it is, she attended to all I could say to her, though I have really fatigued myself with fruitless endeavors to entertain her, with the most immovable gravity; but no sooner did Lovel begin his complaint, than she was seized with a fit of laughing, first affronting the poor beau, and then enjoying his mortification."

"Ha! ha! ha! why there's some genius in that, my Lord, perhaps rather—*rustic*."

Here Maria was called to dance, and so heard no more.

Now, tell me, my dear Sir, did you ever know any thing more provoking? "*A poor weak girl!*" "*ignorant or mischievous!*" What mortifying words! I am resolved, however, that I will never again be tempted to go to an assembly. I wish I had been in Dorsetshire.

Well, after this, you will not be surprised that Lord Orville contented himself with an inquiry after our healths this morning, by his servant, without troubling himself to call; as Miss Mirvan had told me he would: but perhaps it may be only a country custom.

I would not live here for the world. I care not how soon we leave town. London soon grows tiresome. I wish the Captain would come. Mrs. Mirvan talks of the opera for this evening; however, I am very indifferent about it.

Wednesday morning.

Well, my dear Sir, I have been pleased, against my will, I could almost say, for I must own I went out in very ill humor, which I think you cannot wonder at: but the music and the singing were charming; they soothed me into a pleasure the most grateful, the best suited to my present disposition in the world. I hope to persuade Mrs. Mirvan to go again on Saturday. I wish the opera was every night. It is, of all entertainments, the sweetest and most delightful. Some of the songs seemed to melt my very soul. It was what they call a serious opera, as the comic<sup>4</sup> first singer was ill.

Tonight we go to Ranelagh. If any of those three gentlemen who conversed so freely about me should be there—but I won't think of it.

Thursday morning.

Well, my dear Sir, we went to Ranelagh. It is a charming place, and the brilliancy of the lights, on my first entrance, made me almost think I was in some enchanted castle, or fairy palace, for all looked like magic to me.

The very first person I saw was Lord Orville. I felt so confused!—but he did not see me. After tea, Mrs. Mirvan being tired, Maria and I walked round the room alone. Then again we saw him, standing by



the orchestra. We, too, stopped to hear a singer. He bowed to me; I curtsied, and I am sure I colored. We soon walked on, not liking our situation: however, he did not follow us, and when we passed by the orchestra again, he was gone. Afterwards, in the course of the evening, we met him several times, but he was always with some party, and never spoke to us, though whenever he chanced to meet my eyes, he condescended to bow.

I cannot but be hurt at the opinion he entertains of me. It is true, my own behavior incurred it—yet he is himself the most agreeable, and, seemingly, the most amiable man in the world, and therefore it is, that I am grieved to be thought ill of by him: for of whose esteem ought we to be ambitious, if not of those who most merit our own?—But it is too late to reflect upon this now. Well I can't help it;—however, I think I have done with assemblies!

This morning was destined for *seeing sights*, auctions, curious shops, and so forth; but my head ached, and I was not in a humor to be amused, and so I made them go without me, though very unwillingly. They are all kindness.

And now I am sorry I did not accompany them, for I know not what to do with myself. I had resolved not to go to the play tonight; but I believe I shall. In short, I hardly care whether I do or not.

\* \* \*

I thought I had done wrong! Mrs. Mirvan and Maria have been half the town over, and so entertained!—while I, like a fool, stayed at home to do nothing. And, at the auction in Pall-mall,<sup>5</sup> who should they meet but Lord Orville! He sat next to Mrs. Mirvan, and they talked a great deal together: but she gave me no account of the conversation.

I may never have such another opportunity of seeing London; I am quite sorry that I was not of the party; but I deserve this mortification, for having indulged my ill-humor.

Thursday night.

We are just returned from the play, which was King Lear,<sup>6</sup> and has made me very sad. We did not see any body we knew.

Well, adieu, it is too late to write more.

Friday.

Captain Mirvan is arrived. I have not spirits to give an account of his introduction, for he has really shocked me. I do not like him. He seems to be surly, vulgar, and disagreeable.

Almost the same moment that Maria was presented to him, he began some rude jests upon the bad shape of her nose, and called her a tall, ill-formed thing. She bore it with the utmost good-humor; but that kind and sweet-tempered woman, Mrs. Mirvan, deserved a better lot. I am amazed she would marry him.

For my own part, I have been so shy, that I have hardly spoken to him, or he to me. I cannot imagine why the family was so rejoiced at his return. If he had spent his whole life abroad, I should have supposed they might rather have been thankful than sorrowful. However, I hope they do not think so ill of him as I do. At least, I am sure they have too much prudence to make it known.

Saturday night.

We have been to the opera, and I am still more pleased than I was on Tuesday. I could have thought myself in paradise, but for the continual talking of the company around me. We sat in the pit,<sup>7</sup> where every body was dressed in so high a style, that, if I had been less delighted with the performance, my eyes would have found me sufficient entertainment from looking at the ladies.

I was very glad I did not sit next the Captain, for he could not bear the music, or singers, and was extremely gross in his observations of both. When the opera was over, he went into a place called the coffee-room, where ladies as well as gentlemen assemble. There are all sorts of refreshments, and the company walk about, and *chat* with the same ease and freedom as in a private room.

On Monday we go to a ridotto,<sup>8</sup> and on Wednesday we return to Howard Grove. The Captain says he won't stay here to be *smoked*

*with filth* any longer; but, having been seven years *smoked with a burning sun*, he will retire to the country, and sink into *a fair weather* chap.<sup>9</sup> Adieu, my dear Sir.

## Endnotes

- Note 3: Helen of Troy (from ancient Greek myth and poetry) was famously beautiful.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Operas were divided into two kinds, serious (*opera seria*) and comic (*opera buffa*).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Likely Christie's auction room.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The play by Shakespeare.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Seating area on the ground floor of the theater in front of the stage.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A public assembly with dancing.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Evelina repeats the Captain's coarse phrasing and nautical slang.[Return to reference 9](#)

## ***Volume I, Letter XIII***

### **EVELINA IN CONTINUATION.**

Tuesday, April 12.

My dear Sir,

We came home from the ridotto so late, or rather, so early, that it was not possible for me to write. Indeed, we did not *go*, you will be frightened to hear it,—till past eleven o'clock: but nobody does. A terrible reverse of the order of nature! We sleep with the sun, and wake with the moon.

The room was very magnificent, the lights and decorations were brilliant, and the company gay and splendid. But I should have told you, that I made many objections to being of the party, according to the resolution I had formed. However, Maria laughed me out of my scruples, and so once again—I went to an assembly.

Miss Mirvan danced a minuet, but I had not the courage to follow her example. In our walks I saw Lord Orville. He was quite alone, but did not observe us. Yet, as he seemed of no party, I thought it was not impossible that he might join us; and though I did not wish much to dance at all,—yet, as I was more acquainted with him than with any other person in the room, I must own I could not help thinking it would be infinitely more desirable to dance again with him, than with an entire stranger. To be sure, after all that had passed, it was very ridiculous to suppose it even probable, that Lord Orville would again honor me with his choice; yet I am compelled to confess my absurdity, by way of explaining what follows.

Miss Mirvan was soon engaged; and, presently after, a very fashionable, gay-looking man, who seemed about 30 years of age, addressed himself to me, and begged to have the honor of dancing with me. Now Maria's partner was a gentleman of Mrs. Mirvan's acquaintance; for she had told us it was highly improper for young women to dance with strangers, at any public assembly. Indeed it was by no means my wish so to do: yet I did not like to confine myself from dancing at all; neither did I dare refuse this gentleman,

as I had done Mr. Lovel, and then, if any acquaintance should offer, accept him: and so, all these reasons combining, induced me to tell him—yet I blush to write it to you!—that I was *already engaged*; by which I meant to keep myself at liberty to a dance or not, as matters should fall out.

I suppose my consciousness<sup>1</sup> betrayed my artifice, for he looked at me as if incredulous; and, instead of being satisfied with my answer, and leaving me, according to my expectation, he walked at my side, and, with the greatest ease imaginable, began a conversation, in the free style which only belongs to old and intimate acquaintance. But, what was most provoking, he asked me a thousand questions concerning *the partner to whom I was engaged*. And, at last, he said, “Is it really possible that a man whom you have honored with your acceptance can fail to be at hand to profit from your goodness?”

I felt extremely foolish, and begged Mrs. Mirvan to lead to a seat, which she very obligingly did. The Captain sat next her, and, to my great surprise, this gentleman thought proper to follow, and seat himself next to me.

“What an insensible!” continued he, “why, Madam, you are missing the most delightful dance in the world! The man must be either mad, or a fool.—Which do you incline to think him yourself?”

“Neither, Sir,” answered I, in some confusion.

He begged my pardon for the freedom of his supposition, saying, “I really was off my guard, from astonishment that any man can be so much and so unaccountably his own enemy. But where, Madam, can he possibly be?—Has he left the room?—or has not he been in it?”

“Indeed, Sir,” said I peevishly, “I know nothing of him.”

“I don’t wonder that you are disconcerted, Madam, it is really very provoking. The best part of the evening will be absolutely lost. He deserves not that you should wait for him.”

“I do not, Sir,” said I, “and I beg you not to—”

“Mortifying, indeed, Madam,” interrupted he, “a lady to wait for a gentleman:—O fie!—careless fellow!—What can detain him?—Will

you give me leave to seek him?"

"If you please, Sir," answered I, quite terrified lest Mrs. Mirvan should attend to him, for she looked very much surprised at seeing me enter into conversation with a stranger.

"With all my heart," cried he; "pray, what coat has he on?"

"Indeed I never looked at it."

"Out upon him!" cried he; "What! did he address you in a coat not worth looking at?—What a shabby wretch!"

How ridiculous! I really could not help laughing, which, I fear, encouraged him, for he went on.

"Charming creature!—and can you really bear ill usage with so much sweetness? Can you, *like patience on a monument,*<sup>2</sup> smile in the midst of disappointment? For my part, though I am not the offended person, my indignation is so great, that I long to kick the fellow round the room!—unless, indeed," hesitating and looking earnestly at me, "unless, indeed,—it is a partner of your own *creating?*"

I was dreadfully abashed, and could not make an answer.

"But no!" cried he (again, and with warmth) "It cannot be that you are so cruel! Softness itself is painted in your eyes:—You could not, surely, have the barbarity so wantonly to trifle with my misery."

I turned away from this nonsense with real disgust. Mrs. Mirvan saw my confusion, but was perplexed what to think of it, and I could not explain to her the cause, lest the Captain should hear me. I therefore proposed to walk; she consented, and we all rose; but, would you believe it? this man had the assurance to rise too, and walk close by my side, as if of my party!

"Now," cried he, "I hope we shall see this ingrate.—Is that he?"—pointing to an old man, who was lame, "or that?" And in this manner he asked me of whoever was old or ugly in the room. I made no sort of answer; and when he found that I was resolutely silent, and walked on, as much as I could without observing him, he suddenly stamped his foot, and cried out, in a passion, "Fool! idiot! booby!"

I turned hastily toward him: "O, Madam," continued he, "forgive my vehemence, but I am distracted to think there should exist a wretch who can slight a blessing for which I would forfeit my life!—O! that I could but meet him!—I would soon—But I grow angry: pardon me, Madam, my passions are violent, and your injuries affect me!"

I began to apprehend he was a madman, and stared at him with the utmost astonishment. "I see you are moved, Madam," said he, "generous creature!—but don't be alarmed, I am cool again, I am indeed,—upon my soul I am,—I entreat you, most lovely of mortals! I entreat you to be easy."

"Indeed, Sir," said I very seriously, "I must insist upon your leaving me; you are quite a stranger to me, and I am both unused, and averse to your language and your manners."

This seemed to have some effect on him. He made me a low bow, begged my pardon, and vowed he would not for the world offend me.

"Then, Sir, you must leave me," cried I.

"I am gone, Madam, I am gone!" with a most tragical air; and he marched away, a quick pace, out of sight in a moment; but before I had time to congratulate myself, he was again at my elbow.

"And could you really let me go, and not be sorry?—Can you see me suffer torments inexpressible, and yet retain all your favor for that miscreant who flies you?—Ungrateful puppy!—I could bastinado him!"<sup>3</sup>

"For Heaven's sake, my dear," cried Mrs. Mirvan, "who is he talking of?"

"Indeed—I do not know, Madam," said I, "but I wish he would leave me."

"What's all that there?" cried the Captain.

The man made a low bow, and said, "Only, Sir, a slight objection which this young lady makes to dancing with me, and which I am endeavoring to obviate. I shall think myself greatly honored, if you will intercede for me."

"That lady, Sir," said the Captain coldly, "is her own mistress." And he walked sullenly on.

"You, Madam," said the man (who looked delighted, to Mrs. Mirvan), "you, I hope, will have the goodness to speak for me."

"Sir," answered she gravely, "I have not the pleasure of being acquainted with you."

"I hope when you have, Ma'am," cried he (undaunted), "you will honor me with your approbation: but, while I am yet unknown to you, it would be truly generous in you to countenance me; and, I flatter myself, Madam, that you will not have cause to repent it."

Mrs. Mirvan, with an embarrassed air, replied, "I do not at all mean, Sir, to doubt your being a gentleman,—but—"

"But *what*, Madam?—that doubt removed, why a *but*?"

"Well, Sir," said Mrs. Mirvan (with a good-humored smile), "I will even treat you with your own plainness, and try what effect that will have on you: I must therefore tell you, once for all—"

"O pardon me, Madam!" interrupted he eagerly, "you must not proceed with those words, *once for all*; no, if *I* have been too *plain*, and though a *man*, deserve a rebuke, remember, dear ladies, that if you *copy*, you ought, in justice, to *excuse* me."

We both stared at the man's strange behavior.

"Be nobler than your sex," continued he, turning to me, "honor me with one dance, and give up the ingrate who has merited so ill your patience."

Mrs. Mirvan looked with astonishment at us both. "Who does he speak of, my dear?—you never mentioned—"

"O, Madam!" exclaimed he, "he was not worth mentioning—it is a pity he was ever thought of; but let us forget his existence. One dance is all I solicit; permit me, Madam, the honor of this young lady's hand; it will be a favor I shall ever most gratefully acknowledge."

"Sir," answered she, "favors and strangers have with me no connection."



"If you have hitherto," said he, "confined your benevolence to your intimate friends, suffer me to be the first for whom your charity is enlarged."

"Well, Sir, I know not what to say to you,—but—"

He stopped her *but* with so many urgent entreaties, that she at last told me, I must either go down one dance, or avoid his importunities by returning home. I hesitated which alternative to choose; but this impetuous man at length prevailed, and I was obliged to consent to dance with him.

And thus was my deviation from truth punished; and thus did this man's determined boldness conquer.

During the dance, before we were too much engaged in it for conversation, he was extremely provoking about *my partner*, and tried every means in his power to make me own that I had deceived him; which, though I would not so far humble myself as to acknowledge, was, indeed, but too obvious.

Lord Orville, I fancy, did not dance at all; he seemed to have a large acquaintance, and joined several different parties: but you will easily suppose I was not much pleased to see him, in a few minutes after I was gone, walk towards the place I had just left, and bow to, and join Mrs. Mirvan!

How unlucky I thought myself, that I had not longer withstood this stranger's importunities! The moment we had gone down the dance, I was hastening away from him, but he stopped me, and said that I could by no means return to my party, without giving offense, before we had *done our duty of walking up the dance*.<sup>4</sup> As I know nothing at all of these rules and customs, I was obliged to submit to his directions; but I fancy I looked rather uneasy, for he took notice of my inattention, saying, in his free way, "Whence that anxiety?—Why are those lovely eyes perpetually averted?"

"I wish you would say no more to me, Sir," (cried I peevishly) "you have already destroyed all my happiness for this evening."

"Good Heaven! What is it I have done?—How have I merited this scorn?"

"You have tormented me to death; you have forced me from my friends, and intruded yourself upon me, against my will, for a partner."

"Surely, my dear Madam, we ought to be better friends, since there seems to be something of sympathy in the frankness of our dispositions.—And yet, were you not an angel—how do you think I could brook such contempt?"

"If I have offended you," cried I, "you have but to leave me—and O how I wish you would!"

"My dear creature," (said he, half laughing) "why where could you be educated?"

"Where I most sincerely wish I now was!"

"How conscious you must be, all beautiful that you are, that those charming airs serve only to heighten the bloom of your complexion!"

"Your freedom, Sir, where you are more acquainted, may perhaps be less disagreeable; but to *me*—"

"You do me justice," (cried he, interrupting me) "yes, I do indeed improve upon acquaintance; you will hereafter be quite charmed with me."

"Hereafter, Sir, I hope I shall never—"

"O hush!—hush!—have you forgot the situation in which I found you?—Have you forgot, that when deserted, I pursued you,—when betrayed, I adored you?—but for me—"

"But for you, Sir, I might, perhaps, have been happy."

"What then, am I to conclude that, *but for me*, your *partner* would have appeared?—poor fellow!—and did my presence awe him?"

"I wish *his* presence, Sir, could awe *you*!"

"His presence!—perhaps then you see him?"

"Perhaps, Sir, I do," cried I, quite wearied of his raillery.

"Where?—where?—for Heaven's sake show me the wretch!"

"Wretch, Sir?"

"O, a very savage!—a sneaking, shame-faced, despicable puppy!"

I know not what bewitched me—but my pride was hurt, and my spirits were tired, and—in short—I had the folly, looking at Lord Orville, to repeat, “*Despicable*, you think?”

His eyes instantly followed mine; “Why, is *that* the gentleman?”

I made no answer; I could not affirm, and I could not deny: for I hoped to be relieved from his teasing, by his mistake.

The very moment we had done what he called our duty, I eagerly desired to return to Mrs. Mirvan.

“To your *partner*, I presume, Madam?” said he, very gravely.

This quite confounded me; I dreaded lest this mischievous man, ignorant of his rank, should address himself to Lord Orville, and say something which might expose my artifice. Fool! to involve myself in such difficulties! I now feared what I had before wished; and therefore, to *avoid* Lord Orville, I was obliged myself to *propose* going down another dance, though I was ready to sink with shame while I spoke.

“But your *partner*, Ma’am?” (said he, affecting a very solemn air) “perhaps he may resent my detaining you: if you will give me leave to ask his consent—”

“Not for the universe.”

“Who is he, Madam?”

I wished myself a hundred miles off. He repeated his question, “What is his name?”

“Nothing—nobody—I don’t know—”

He assumed a most important solemnity; “How!—not know?—Give me leave, my dear Madam, to recommend this caution to you; never dance in public with a stranger,—with one whose name you are unacquainted with,—who may be a mere adventurer,—a man of no character,—consider to what impertinence you may expose yourself.”

Was ever any thing so ridiculous? I could not help laughing, in spite of my vexation.

At this instant, Mrs. Mirvan, followed by Lord Orville, walked up to us. You will easily believe it was not difficult for me to recover my

gravity; but what was my consternation, when this strange man, destined to be the scourge of my artifice, exclaimed, "Ha! My Lord Orville!—I protest I did not know your Lordship. What can I say for my usurpation?—Yet, faith, my Lord, such a prize was not to be neglected."

My shame and confusion were unspeakable. Who could have supposed or foreseen that this man knew Lord Orville! But falsehood is not more unjustifiable than unsafe.

Lord Orville—well he might—looked all amazement.

"The philosophic coldness of your Lordship," continued this odious creature, "every man is not endowed with. I have used my utmost endeavors to entertain this lady, though I fear without success; and your Lordship will not be a little flattered, if acquainted with the difficulty which attended my procuring the honor of only one dance." Then, turning to me, who was sinking with shame, while Lord Orville stood motionless, and Mrs. Mirvan astonished,—he suddenly seized my hand, saying, "Think, my Lord, what must be my reluctance to resign this fair hand to your Lordship!"

In the same instant, Lord Orville took it of him; I colored violently, and made an effort to recover it. "You do me too much honor, Sir," cried he, (with an air of gallantry, pressing it to his lips before he let it go) "however, I shall be happy to profit by it, if this lady," (turning to Mrs. Mirvan) "will permit me to seek for her party."

To compel him thus to dance, I could not endure, and eagerly called out, "By no means,—not for the world!—I must beg—"

"Will you honor *me*, Madam, with your commands," cried my tormentor; "may *I* seek the lady's party?"

"No, Sir," answered I, turning from him.

"What *shall* be done, my dear," said Mrs. Mirvan.

"Nothing, Ma'am;—any thing, I mean—"

"But do you dance, or not? you see his Lordship waits."

"I hope not,—I beg that—I would not for the world—I am sure I ought to—to—"

I could not speak; but that confident man, determined to discover whether or not I had deceived him, said to Lord Orville,

who stood suspended, "My Lord, this affair, which, at present, seems perplexed, I will briefly explain;—this lady proposed to me another dance,—nothing could have made me more happy—I only wished for your Lordship's permission, which, if now granted, will, I am persuaded, set everything right."

I glowed with indignation. "No, Sir—It is your absence, and that alone, can set every thing right."

"For Heaven's sake, my dear," (cried Mrs. Mirvan, who could no longer contain her surprise), "what does all this mean?—were you pre-engaged?—had Lord Orville—"

"No, Madam," cried I, "—only—only I did not know that gentleman,—and so—and so I thought—I intended—I—"

Overpowered by all that had passed, I had not strength to make my mortifying explanation;—my spirits quite failed me, and I burst into tears.

They all seemed shocked and amazed.

"What is the matter, my dearest love?" cried Mrs. Mirvan, with kindest concern.

"What have I done?" exclaimed my evil genius, and ran officiously for a glass of water.

However, a hint was sufficient for Lord Orville, who comprehended all I would have explained. He immediately led me to a seat, and said, in a low voice, "Be not distressed, I beseech you: I shall ever think my name honored by your making use of it."

This politeness relieved me. A general murmur had alarmed Miss Mirvan, who flew instantly to me; while Lord Orville the moment Mrs. Mirvan had taken the water, led my tormentor away.

"For Heaven's sake, dear Madam," cried I, "let me go home,—indeed I cannot stay here any longer."

"Let us all go," cried my kind Maria.

"But the Captain, what will he say?—I had better go home in a chair."<sup>5</sup>

Mrs. Mirvan consented, and I rose to depart. Lord Orville and that man both came to me. The first, with an attention I but ill

merited from him, led me to a chair; while the other followed, pestering me with apologies. I wished to have made mine to Lord Orville, but was too much ashamed.

It was about one o'clock. Mrs. Mirvan's servants saw me home.

And now,—what again shall ever tempt me to an assembly? I dread to hear what you will think of me, my most dear and honored Sir: you will need your utmost partiality to receive me without displeasure.

This morning Lord Orville has sent to inquire after our healths: and Sir Clement Willoughby, for that, I find, is the name of my persecutor, has called: but I would not go down stairs till he was gone.

And now, my dear Sir, I can somewhat account for the strange, provoking, and ridiculous conduct of this Sir Clement last night; for Miss Mirvan says, he is the very man with whom she heard Lord Orville conversing at Mrs. Stanley's, when I was spoken of in so mortifying a manner. He was pleased to say he was glad to hear I was a fool, and therefore, I suppose, he concluded he might talk as much nonsense as he pleased to me: however, I am very indifferent as to his opinion;—but for Lord Orville,—if then he thought me an idiot, now, I am sure, he must suppose me both bold and presuming. Make use of his name!—what impertinence!—he can never know how it happened,—he can only imagine it was from an excess of vanity:—well, however, I shall leave this bad city tomorrow, and never again will I enter it.

The Captain intends to take us tonight to the Fantoccini.<sup>6</sup> I cannot bear that Captain; I can give you no idea how gross he is. I heartily rejoice that he was not present at the disagreeable conclusion of yesterday's adventure, for I am sure he would have contributed to my confusion; which might perhaps have diverted him, as he seldom or never smiles but at some other person's expense.

And here I conclude my London letters,—and without any regret, for I am too inexperienced and ignorant to conduct myself with

propriety in this town, where every thing is new to me, and many things are unaccountable and perplexing.

Adieu, my dear Sir; Heaven restore me safely to you! I wish I was to go immediately to Berry Hill; yet the wish is ungrateful to Mrs. Mirvan, and therefore I will repress it. I shall write an account of the Fantoccini from Howard Grove. We have not been to half the public places that are now open, though I dare say you will think we have been to all. But they are almost as innumerable as the persons who fill them.

## 1778 **Endnotes**

1779

- Note 1: Self-consciousness. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: He quotes Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* (ca. 1601) 2.4.114. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hit him with a stick. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In country dances, couples moved down through two lines of dancers and then back up the lines. It was a breach of etiquette to stop halfway. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A mode of transportation for hire, carried by chairmen. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: As Evelina explains in the next letter, "a little comedy, in French and Italian, by puppets." [Return to reference 6](#)

## ***From The Journal and Letters***



[FIRST JOURNAL ENTRY]

*Poland Street, London, March 27, 1768<sup>1</sup>*

To have some account of my thoughts, manners, acquaintance and actions, when the hour arrives at which time is more nimble than memory, is the reason which induces me to keep a journal: a journal in which I must confess my *every* thought, must open my whole heart! But a thing of this kind ought to be addressed to somebody—I must imagine myself to be talking—talking to the most intimate of friends—to one in whom I should take delight in confiding, and feel remorse in concealment: but who must this friend be?—to make choice of one to whom I can but *half* rely, would be to frustrate entirely the intention of my plan. The only one I could wholly, totally confide in, lives in the same house with me, and not only never *has*, but never *will*, leave me one secret *to* tell her.<sup>2</sup> To whom, then *must* I dedicate my wonderful, surprising and interesting adventures?—to *whom* dare I reveal my private opinion of my nearest relations? the secret thoughts of my dearest friends? my own hopes, fears, reflections and dislikes—Nobody!

To Nobody, then, will I write my Journal! since To Nobody can I be wholly unreserved—to Nobody can I reveal every thought, every wish of my heart, with the most unlimited confidence, the most unremitting sincerity to the end of my life! For what chance, what accident can end my connections with Nobody? No secret *can* I conceal from No—body, and to No—body can I be *ever* unreserved. Disagreement cannot stop our affection, Time itself has no power to end our friendship. The love, the esteem I entertain for Nobody, Nobody's self has not power to destroy. From Nobody I have nothing to fear, the secrets sacred to friendship, Nobody will not reveal, when the affair is doubtful, Nobody will not look towards the side least favourable.—

I will suppose you, then, to be my best friend; tho' God forbid you ever should! my dearest companion—and a romantick girl, for mere oddity may perhaps be more sincere—more *tender*—than if

you were a friend in propria personae<sup>3</sup>—in as much as imagination often exceeds reality. In your breast my errors may create pity without exciting contempt; may raise your compassion, without eradicating your love.

From this moment, then, my dear girl—but why, permit me to ask, must a *female* be made Nobody? Ah! my dear, what were this world good for, *were* Nobody a female? And now I have done with *perambulation*.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: This is the first page of Burney's first journal, begun when she was fifteen.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Burney's younger sister Susanna. In 1773, when Burney spent the summer away from home, she began a journal for her sister, continuing it off and on until 1800, when Susanna died.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As a real person.[Return to reference 3](#)

[A YOUNG AND AGREEABLE INFIDEL]

Bath, June 1780

Miss White<sup>4</sup> is young and pleasing in her appearance, not pretty, but agreeable in her face, and soft, gentle and well bred in her manners. Our conversation, for some time, was upon the common Bath topics,—but when Mrs. Lambart left us,—called to receive more company, we went, insensibly, into graver matters.

As I soon found, by the looks and expressions of this young lady, that she was of a *peculiar cast*, I left all choice of subjects to herself, determined quietly to follow as she led. And very soon, and I am sure I know not how, we had for topics the follies and vices of mankind,—and indeed she spared not for lashing them!—The *women* she rather excused than defended, laying to the door of the *men* their faults and imperfections;—but the *men*, she said, were *all* bad,—*all*, in one word, and without exception, *sensualists*.

I stared much at a severity of speech for which her softness of manner had so ill prepared me,—and she, perceiving my surprise, said “I am sure I ought to apologise for speaking *my* opinion to *you*,—*you*, who have so just and so uncommon a knowledge of human nature,—I have long wished ardently to have the honour of conversing with you,—but your party has, altogether, been regarded as so formidable, that I have not had courage to approach it.”

I made, as what could I do else, disqualifying speeches, and she then led to discoursing of happiness and misery;—the *latter* she held to be the *invariable* lot of us all,—and “*one* word,” she added, “we have in our language, and in all other, for which there is never any essential necessity,—and that is *pleasure*.” And her eyes filled with tears as she spoke.

“How you amaze me!” cried I: “I have met with *misanthropes* before, but never with so complete a one,—and I can hardly think I hear right when I see how young you are.”

She then, in rather indirect terms, gave me to understand that she was miserable *at home*,—and in *very direct* terms that she was

wretched *abroad*, and openly said that to affliction she was born, and in affliction she must die, for that the world was so vilely formed as to render happiness *impossible* for its inhabitants.

There was something in this freedom of repining that I could by no means approve, and as I found by all her manner that she had a disposition to even *respect* whatever I said, why I now grew very serious, and frankly told her that I could not think it consistent with either truth or religion to cherish such notions.

"One thing," answered she, "there is which I believe *might* make me happy,—but for that I have no inclination;—it is an amorous disposition. But that I do not possess; I can make myself no happiness by intrigue."

"I hope not, indeed!" cried I, almost confounded by her extraordinary notions and speeches,—“but surely there are worthier subjects of happiness attainable.”—

"No, I believe there are not,—and the reason the men are happier than us, is because they are more sensual."

"I would not *think such thoughts*," cried I, clasping my hands with an involuntary vehemence, "for worlds!"—

The Miss Caldwells then interrupted us, and seated themselves next to us,—but Miss White paid them little attention at first, and soon after none at all, but, in a low voice, continued her discourse with me; recurring to the same subject of happiness and misery, upon which, after again asserting the folly of ever hoping for the former, she made this speech—

"There may be, indeed, *one moment* of happiness,—which must be the finding one worthy of exciting a passion which one should dare own to himself! *That* would, indeed, be a moment worth living for! but that can never happen,—I am sure not to *me*,—the men are so low, so vicious,—so worthless!—no, there is not one such to be found."

\* \* \*

"Well,—you are a most extraordinary character indeed! I must confess I have seen *nothing like you!*"

"I hope, however, *I* shall find something like myself,—and, like the magnet rolling in the dust, attract some metal as I go."

"That you may *attract* what you please, is of all things most likely;—but if you wait to be happy for a friend resembling *yourself*, I shall no longer wonder at your despondency."

"O!" cried she, raising her eyes in ecstasy, "*could* I find such a one!—male or female,—for sex would be indifferent to me, with such a one I would go to *live* directly."

I half laughed,—but was perplexed in my own mind whether to be *sad* or *merry* at such a speech.

"But then," she continued, "after *making*—should I *lose* such a friend—I would not survive!"

"Not survive?" repeated I; "what can you mean?"

She looked down, but said nothing.

"Surely you cannot mean," said I, *very* gravely indeed, "to put a violent end to your life?"

"I should not," said she, again looking up, "hesitate a moment."

I was quite thunderstruck,—and for some time could not say a word;—but when I *did* speak, it was in a style of exhortation so serious and earnest I am ashamed to write it to you lest you should think it too much.

She gave me an attention that was even *respectful*, but when I urged her to tell me by what *right* she thought herself entitled to *rush unlicensed on Eternity*,<sup>5</sup> she said—"By the right of believing I shall be *extinct*."

I really felt *horror'd!*

"Where, for heaven's sake," I cried, "where have you picked up such dreadful reasoning?"

"In *Hume*," said she;—"I have read his *Essays*<sup>6</sup> repeatedly."

"I am sorry to find they have power to do so much mischief; you should not have read them, at least, till a man equal to Hume in *abilities* had answered him. Have you read any more infidel writers?"

"Yes,—Bolingbroke,<sup>7</sup>—the divinest of all writers!"

"And do you read nothing upon the *right* side?"

"Yes,—the Bible, till I was sick to death of it, every Sunday evening to my mother."

"Have you read Beattie on the immutability of Truth?"<sup>8</sup>

"No."

"Give me leave, then, to recommend it to you. After Hume's *Essays*, you *ought* to read it. And even, for *lighter* reading, if you were to look at Mason's elegy on Lady Coventry,<sup>9</sup> it might be of no disservice to you."

\* \* \*

This was the chief of our conversation,—which indeed made an impression upon me I shall not easily get rid of, a young and agreeable *infidel* is even a shocking sight,—and with her romantic, flighty and unguarded turn of mind, what could happen to her that could surprise?

Poor misguided girl!<sup>1</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 4: Lydia Rogers White (ca. 1763–1827) would become a well-known London hostess and wit.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Burney echoes lines from William Mason's dramatic poem *Elfrida* (1752).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The edition of David Hume's *Essays* published in 1777, the year after his death, included two essays previously suppressed: "Of Suicide," which argues that suicide is not a transgression, and "Of the Immortality of the Soul," which argues that immortality is unlikely and cannot be proved.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The philosophical *Letters, or Essays, addressed to Alexander Pope* (1754) by Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke,

advocates a religion and ethics based on nature rather than on the teachings of the established church.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: James Beattie, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (1770), attempts to refute Hume and other “infidels.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Burney quotes eight lines on immortality from William Mason’s elegy “On the Death of a Lady” (1760).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A fictional version of the “young infidel” plays a major role in Burney’s last novel, *The Wanderer* (1814).[Return to reference 1](#)

## [A MASTECTOMY]

*Paris, March 22, 1812<sup>1</sup>*

Separated as I have now so long—long been from my dearest father—brothers—sisters—nieces, and native friends, I would spare, at least, their kind hearts any grief for me but what they must inevitably feel in reflecting upon the sorrow of such an absence to one so tenderly attached to all her first and forever so dear and regretted ties—nevertheless, if they should hear that I have been dangerously ill from any hand but my own, they might have doubts of my perfect recovery which my own alone can obviate. And how can I hope they will escape hearing what has reached Seville to the south, and Constantinople to the east? from both I have had messages—yet nothing could urge me to this communication till I heard that M. de Boinville<sup>2</sup> had written it to his wife, without any precaution, because in ignorance of my plan of silence. Still I must hope it may never travel to my dearest father—But to you, my beloved Esther, who, living more in the world, will surely hear it ere long, to you I will write the whole history, certain that, from the moment you know any evil has befallen me your kind kind heart will be constantly anxious to learn its extent and its circumstances, as well as its termination.

About August, in the year 1810, I began to be annoyed by a small pain in my breast, which went on augmenting from week to week, yet, being rather heavy than acute, without causing me any uneasiness with respect to consequences: Alas, “what was the ignorance?” The most sympathizing of partners, however, was more disturbed: not a start, not a wry face, not a movement that indicated pain was unobserved, and he early conceived apprehensions to which I was a stranger. He pressed me to see some surgeon; I revolted from the idea, and hoped, by care and warmth, to make all succor unnecessary. Thus passed some months, during which Madame de Maisonneuve, my particularly intimate friend, joined with M. d’Arblay to press me to consent to an examination. I thought



their fears groundless, and could not make so great a conquest over my repugnance. I relate this false confidence, now, as a warning to my dear Esther—my sisters and nieces, should any similar sensations excite similar alarm. M. d'Arblay now revealed his uneasiness to another of our kind friends, Mme. de Tracy, who wrote to me a long and eloquent letter upon the subject, that began to awaken very unpleasant surmises; and a conference with her ensued, in which her urgency and representations, aided by her long experience of disease, and most miserable existence by art, subdued me, and, most painfully and reluctantly, I ceased to object, and M. d'Arblay summoned a physician—M. Bourdois? Maria will cry;—No, my dear Maria, I would not give your beau frere<sup>3</sup> that trouble; not him, but Dr. Jouart, the physician of Miss Potts. Thinking but slightly of my statement, he gave me some directions that produced no fruit—on the contrary, I grew worse, and M. d'Arblay now would take no denial to my consulting M. Dubois, who had already attended and cured me in an abscess of which Maria, my dearest Esther, can give you the history. M. Dubois, the most celebrated surgeon of France, was then appointed accoucheur to the empress, and already lodged in the Tuilleries,<sup>4</sup> and in constant attendance: but nothing could slacken the ardour of M. d'Arblay to obtain the first advice. Fortunately for his kind wishes, M. Dubois had retained a partial regard for me from the time of his former attendance, and, when applied to through a third person, he took the first moment of liberty, granted by a *promenade* taken by the empress, to come to me. It was now I began to perceive my real danger, M. Dubois gave me a prescription to be pursued for a month, during which time he could not undertake to see me again, and pronounced nothing—but uttered so many charges to me to be tranquil, and to suffer no uneasiness, that I could not but suspect there was room for terrible inquietude. My alarm was increased by the nonappearance of M. d'Arblay after his departure. They had remained together some time in the book room, and M. d'Arblay did not return—till, unable to bear the suspense, I begged him to come back. He, also, sought then to tranquilize me—but in words only; his looks were shocking! his

features, his whole face displayed the bitterest woe. I had not, therefore, much difficulty in telling myself what he endeavored not to tell me—that a small operation would be necessary to avert evil consequences!—Ah, my dearest Esther, for this I felt no courage—my dread and repugnance, from a thousand reasons *besides* the pain, almost shook all my faculties, and, for some time, I was rather confounded and stupified than affrighted.—Direful, however, was the effect of this interview; the pains became quicker and more violent, and the hardness of the spot affected increased. I took, but vainly, my proscription, and every symptom grew more serious.

\* \* \*

A physician was now called in, Dr. Moreau, to hear if he could suggest any new means: but Dr. Larrey<sup>5</sup> had left him no resources untried. A formal consultation now was held, of Larrey, Ribe, and Moreau—and, in fine, I was formally condemned to an operation by all three. I was as much astonished as disappointed—for the poor breast was no where discoloured, and not much larger than its healthy neighbor. Yet I felt the evil to be deep, so deep, that I often thought if it could not be dissolved, it could only with life be extirpated. I called up, however, all the reason I possessed, or could assume, and told them that—if they saw no other alternative, I would not resist their opinion and experience:—the good Dr. Larrey, who, during his long attendance had conceived for me the warmest friendship, had now tears in his eyes; from my dread he had expected resistance.

\* \* \*

All hope of escaping this evil now at an end, I could only console or employ my mind in considering how to render it less dreadful to M. d'Arblay. M. Dubois had pronounced "il faut s'attendre à souffrir, Je ne veux pas vous tromper—Vous souffrirez—vous souffrirez *beaucoup*!—"<sup>6</sup> M. Ribe had *charged* me to cry! to withhold or restrain myself might have seriously bad consequences, he said. M.

Moreau, in echoing this injunction, inquired whether I had cried or screamed at the birth of Alexander—Alas, I told him, it had not been possible to do otherwise; Oh then, he answered, there is no fear!—What terrible inferences were here to be drawn! I desired, therefore, that M. d'Arblay might be kept in ignorance of the day till the operation should be over. To this they agreed, except M. Larrey, with high approbation: M. Larrey looked dissentient, but was silent. M. Dubois protested he would not undertake to act, after what he had seen of the agitated spirits of M. d'Arblay if he were present: nor would he suffer me to know the time myself over night; I obtained with difficulty a promise of 4 hours warning, which were essential to me for sundry regulations.

From this time, I assumed the best spirits in my power, *to meet the coming blow*;—and support my too sympathizing partner.

\* \* \*

Sundry necessary works and orders filled up my time entirely till one o'clock, when all was ready—but Dr. Moreau then arrived, with news that M. Dubois could not attend till three. Dr. Aumont went away—and the coast was clear. This, indeed, was a dreadful interval. I had no longer any thing to do—I had only to think—two hours thus spent seemed never-ending. I would fain have written to my dearest father—to you, my Esther—to Charlotte James—Charles—Amelia Lock—but my arm prohibited me: I strolled to the salon—I saw it fitted with preparations, and I recoiled—But I soon returned; to what effect disguise from myself what I must so soon know?—yet the sight of the immense quantity of bandages, compresses, sponges, lint—made me a little sick:—I walked backwards and forwards till I quieted all emotion, and became by degrees, nearly stupid—torpid, without sentiment or consciousness;—and thus I remained till the clock struck three. A sudden spirit of exertion then returned,—I defied my poor arm, no longer worth sparing, and took my long banished pen to write a few words to M. d'Arblay—and a few more for Alex, in case of a fatal result. These short billets I could only deposit safely, when the cabriolets<sup>7</sup>—one—two—three—four—

succeeded rapidly to each other in stopping at the door. Dr. Moreau instantly entered my room, to see if I were alive. He gave me a wine cordial, and went to the salon. I rang for my maid and nurses,—but before I could speak to them, my room, without previous message, was entered by 7 men in black, Dr. Larrey, M. Dubois, Dr. Moreau, Dr. Aumont, Dr. Ribe, and a pupil of Dr. Larrey, and another of M. Dubois. I was now awakened from my stupor—and by a sort of indignation—Why so many? and without leave?—But I could not utter a syllable. M. Dubois acted as commander in chief. Dr. Larrey kept out of sight; M. Dubois ordered a bedstead into the middle of the room. Astonished, I turned to Dr. Larrey, who had promised that an arm chair would suffice; but he hung his head, and would not look at me. Two *old mattresses* M. Dubois then demanded, and an old sheet. I now began to tremble violently, more with distaste and horror of the preparations even than of the pain. These arranged to his liking, he desired me to mount the bedstead. I stood suspended, for a moment, whether I should not abruptly escape—I looked at the door, the windows—I felt desperate—but it was only for a moment, my reason then took the command, and my fears and feelings struggled vainly against it. I called to my maid—she was crying, and the two nurses stood, transfixed, at the door. “Let those women all go!” cried M. Dubois. This order recovered me my voice—“No,” I cried, “let them stay! *qu’elles restent!*” This occasioned a little dispute, that re-animated me—The maid, however, and one of the nurses ran off—I charged the other to approach, and she obeyed. M. Dubois now tried to issue his commands *en militaire*,<sup>8</sup> but I resisted all that were resistable—I was compelled, however, to submit to taking off my long robe de chambre,<sup>9</sup> which I had meant to retain—Ah, then, how did I think of my sisters!—not one, at so dreadful an instant, at hand, to protect—adjust—guard me—I regretted that I had refused Mme de Maisonneuve—Mme Chastel—no one upon whom I could rely—my departed angel!<sup>1</sup>—how did I think of her!—how did I long—long for my Esther—my Charlotte!—My distress was, I suppose, apparent, though not my wishes, for M. Dubois himself now softened, and spoke soothingly. “Can *you*,” I cried, “feel for an

operation that, to *you*, must seem so trivial?"—"Trivial?" he repeated—taking up a bit of paper, which he tore, unconsciously, into a million pieces, "*oui—c'est peu de chose—mais—*"<sup>2</sup> he stammered, and could not go on. No one else attempted to speak, but I was softened myself, when I saw even M. Dubois grow agitated, while Dr. Larrey kept always aloof, yet a glance showed me he was pale as ashes. I knew not, positively, then, the immediate danger, but every thing convinced me danger was hovering about me, and that this experiment could alone save me from its jaws. I mounted, therefore, unbidden, the bedstead—and M. Dubois placed me upon the mattress, and spread a cambric handkerchief upon my face. It was transparent, however, and I saw, through it, that the bedstead was instantly surrounded by the 7 men and my nurse. I refused to be held; but when, bright through the cambric, I saw the glitter of polished steel—I closed my eyes. I would not trust to convulsive fear the sight of the terrible incision. A silence the most profound ensued, which lasted for some minutes, during which, I imagine, they took their orders by signs, and made their examination—Oh what a horrible suspension!—I did not breathe—and M. Dubois tried vainly to find any pulse. This pause, at length, was broken by Dr. Larrey, who in a voice of solemn melancholy, said "Qui me tiendra ce sein?"<sup>3</sup> —"

No one answered; at least not verbally; but this aroused me from my passively submissive state, for I feared they imagined the whole breast infected—feared it too justly,—for, again through the cambric, I saw the hand of M. Dubois held up, while his forefinger first described a straight line from top to bottom of the breast, secondly a cross, and thirdly a circle; intimating that the whole was to be taken off. Excited by this idea, I started up, threw off my veil, and, in answer to the demand "Qui me tiendra ce sein?" cried "C'est moi, Monsieur!"<sup>4</sup> and I held my hand under it, and explained the nature of my sufferings, which all sprang from one point, though they darted into every part. I was heard attentively, but in utter silence, and M. Dubois then, re-placed me as before, and, as before, spread my veil over my face. How vain, alas, my representation!

immediately again I saw the fatal finger describe the cross—and the circle—Hopeless, then, desperate, and self-given up, I closed once more my eyes, relinquishing all watching, all resistance, all interference, and sadly resolute to be wholly resigned.

My dearest Esther,—and all my dears to whom she communicates this doleful ditty, will rejoice to hear that this resolution once taken, was firmly adhered to, in defiance of a terror that surpasses all description, and the most torturing pain. Yet—when the dreadful steel was plunged into the breast—cutting through veins—arteries—flesh—nerves—I needed no injunctions not to restrain my cries. I began a scream that lasted unintermittingly during the whole time of the incision—and I almost marvel that it rings not in my ears still! so excruciating was the agony. When the wound was made, and the instrument was withdrawn, the pain seemed undiminished, for the air that suddenly rushed into those delicate parts felt like a mass of minute but sharp and forked poniards,<sup>5</sup> that were tearing the edges of the wound—but when again I felt the instrument—describing a curve—cutting against the grain, if I may so say, while the flesh resisted in a manner so forcible as to oppose and tire the hand of the operator, who was forced to change from the right to the left—then, indeed, I thought I must have expired. I attempted no more to open my eyes,—they felt as if hermetically shut, and so firmly closed, that the eyelids seemed indented into the cheeks. The instrument this second time withdrawn, I concluded the operation over,—Oh no! presently the terrible cutting was renewed—and worse than ever, to separate the bottom, the foundation of this dreadful gland from the parts to which it adhered—Again all description would be baffled—yet again all was not over,—Dr. Larrey rested but his own hand, and—Oh heaven!—I then felt the knife rackling<sup>6</sup> against the breast bone—scraping it!—This performed, while I yet remained in utterly speechless torture, I heard the voice of Mr. Larrey,—(all others guarded a dead silence) in a tone nearly tragic, desire every one present to pronounce if anything more remained to be done; or if he thought the operation complete. The general voice was yes,—but the finger of Mr. Dubois—which I literally *felt* elevated



over the wound, though I saw nothing, and though he touched nothing, so indescribably sensitive was the spot—pointed to some further requisition<sup>7</sup>—and again began the scraping!—and, after this, Dr. Moreau thought he discerned a peccant atom—and still, and still, M. Dubois demanded atom after atom—My dearest Esther, not for days, not for weeks, but for months I could not speak of this terrible business without nearly again going through it! I could not *think* of it with impunity! I was sick, I was disordered by a single question—even now, 9 months after it is over, I have a head ache from going on with the account! and this miserable account, which I began 3 months ago, at least, I dare not revise, nor read, the recollection is still so painful.

To conclude, the evil was so profound, the case so delicate, and the precautions necessary for preventing a return so numerous, that the operation, including the treatment and the dressing, lasted 20 minutes! a time, for sufferings so acute, that was hardly supportable—However, I bore it with all the courage I could exert, and never moved, nor stopped them, nor resisted, nor remonstrated, nor spoke—except once or twice, during the dressings, to say “Ah Messieurs! que je vous plains!”<sup>8</sup> for indeed I was sensible to the feeling concern with which they all saw what I endured, though my speech was principally—*very* principally meant for Dr. Larrey. Except this, I uttered not a syllable, save, when so often they re-commenced, calling out “Avertissez moi, Messieurs! avertissez moi!”<sup>9</sup> Twice, I believe, I fainted; at least, I have two total chasms in my memory of this transaction, that impede my tying together what passed. When all was done, and they lifted me up that I might be put to bed, my strength was so totally annihilated, that I was obliged to be carried, and could not even sustain my hands and arms, which hung as if I had been lifeless; while my face, as the nurse has told me, was utterly colorless. This removal made me open my eyes—and I then saw my good Dr. Larrey, pale nearly as myself, his face streaked with blood, and its expression depicting grief, apprehension, and almost horror.

When I was in bed,—my poor M. d’Arblay—who ought to write you himself his own history of this morning—was called to me—and afterwards our Alex.—

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Burney (now Madame d’Arblay) sent this letter to Esther Burney, her sister; it describes an operation performed the previous September.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Because Chastel de Boinville’s wife was English, it was likely that news of the illness would spread to the Burney family in England.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Brother-in-law. Maria (or Marianne), Esther Burney’s daughter, had married Antoine Bourdois, whose brother was a prominent French physician.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The royal palace in Paris. “Accoucheur”: obstetrician.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Dominique-Jean Larrey, “Napoleon’s surgeon,” is remembered for his courage on the battlefield and his innovative procedures.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: You must expect to suffer. I do not want to deceive you—you will suffer—you will suffer *greatly* (French). Operations were then performed without anesthetics.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Carriages.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In military fashion (French). Most of the attending physicians had been army surgeons.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Dressing gown.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Susanna, Burney’s favorite sister, had died in 1800.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Yes—it is not much—but— (French).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Who will hold this breast for me? (French).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *I will* (French).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Daggers.[Return to reference 5](#)



- Note 6: Raking (?).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Necessity. Surgical practice of the time dictated that “the whole diseased structure” be cut out, no matter how long or painful the operation.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: How I pity you! (French).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Give me warning! (French).[Return to reference 9](#)

### [M. D'ARBLAY'S POSTSCRIPT]

No! No my dearest and ever more dear friends, I shall not make a *fruitless* attempt. No language could convey what I felt in the deadly course of these seven hours. Nevertheless, every one *of you, my dearest dearest friends*, can guess, must even know it. Alexandre had no less feeling, but showed more fortitude. He, perhaps, will be more able to describe to you, nearly at least, the torturing state of my poor heart and soul. Besides, I must own, to you, that these details which were, till just now, quite unknown to me, have almost killed me, and I am only able to thank God that this more than half angel has had the sublime courage to deny herself the comfort I might have offered her, to spare me, not the sharing of her excruciating pains, that was impossible, but the witnessing so terrific a scene, and perhaps the remorse to have rendered it more tragic. For I don't flatter myself I could have got through it—I must confess it.

Thank heaven! She is now surprisingly well, and in good spirits, and we hope to have many many still happy days. May that of peace soon arrive, and enable me to embrace better than with my pen my beloved and ever ever more dear friends of the town and country. Amen. Amen!<sup>1</sup>

## Endnotes

- Note 1: The wound healed without infection. Burney returned to England later in 1812 and lived for twenty-eight more years.[Return to reference 1](#)

## **WILLIAM COWPER**

### **1731–1800**

William Cowper found great success as a poet—he is among the most beloved writers of the period. Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge felt close to him, and so did many literary women. His personal life, however, was complicated, sometimes anguished and tumultuous. After attempting suicide in 1763, he believed that he was damned for having tried to commit the unforgivable sin, the “sin against the Holy Ghost.” From then on, a refugee from life, he looked for hope in Evangelicalism and found shelter first, in 1765, in the family of the clergyman Morley Unwin, and after Unwin’s death, with his widow, Mary Unwin, who cared for Cowper until her death in 1796. Their move to rural Olney (pronounced *Own-y*) in 1768 brought them under the influence of the strenuous and fervent Evangelical minister John Newton, author of “Amazing Grace.” With him Cowper wrote the famous *Olney Hymns*, still familiar to Methodists and other Nonconformists. But a second attack of his illness, in 1773, not only frustrated his planned marriage to Mary Unwin but left him for the rest of his life with the assurance that he had been cast out by God. He never again attended services, and the main purpose of his life thereafter was to divert his mind from numb despair by every possible innocent device. He gardened, he kept pets, he walked, he wrote letters (some of the best of the eighteenth century), he conversed, he read—and he wrote poetry.

When his poetry was published, it brought him a measure of fame that his modest nature could never have hoped for.

Cowper's major work is *The Task* (1785), undertaken at the bidding of Lady Austen, a friend who, when he complained that he had no subject, directed him to write about the sofa in his parlor. It began with a mock-heroic account of the development of the sofa from a simple stool, but it grew into a long meditative poem of more than five thousand lines. The poet describes his small world of country, village, garden, and parlor, and from time to time he glances toward the great world to condemn cities and worldliness, war and slavery, luxury and corruption. The tone is muted, the sensibility delicate, the language on the whole precise and clear. Contemporary readers responded powerfully, recognizing their own concerns in his pious and humorous musings.

## ***From The Task***

**From *Book 1***

**[A LANDSCAPE DESCRIBED. RURAL SOUNDS]**

150 Thou<sup>1</sup> knowest my praise of nature most sincere,  
And that my raptures are not conjured up  
To serve occasions of poetic pomp,  
But genuine, and art partner of them all.  
How oft upon yon eminence our pace  
Has slackened to a pause, and we have borne  
155 The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,  
While admiration, feeding at the eye,  
And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene.  
Thence with what pleasure have we just discerned  
The distant plow slow moving, and beside  
160 His laboring team, that swerved not from the track,  
The sturdy swain diminished to a boy!  
Here Ouse,<sup>2</sup> slow winding through a level plain  
Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o'er,  
Conducts the eye along its sinuous course  
165 Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,  
Stand, never overlooked, our favorite elms,  
That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;  
While far beyond, and overthwart the stream  
That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,  
170 The sloping land recedes into the clouds;  
Displaying on its varied side the grace  
Of hedgerow beauties numberless, square tower,  
Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells  
Just undulates upon the listening ear,  
175 Groves, heaths, and smoking villages, remote.  
Scenes must be beautiful, which, daily viewed,  
Please daily, and whose novelty survives  
Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years—  
Praise justly due to those that I describe.  
180 Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds,

Exhilarate the spirit, and restore  
 The tone of languid Nature. Mighty winds,  
 That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood  
 Of ancient growth, make music not unlike  
 185 The dash of ocean on his winding shore,  
 And lull the spirit while they fill the mind;  
 Unnumbered branches waving in the blast,  
 And all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once.  
 Nor less composure waits upon the roar  
 190 Of distant floods, or on the softer voice  
 Of neighboring fountain, or of rills that slip  
 Through the cleft rock, and, chiming as they fall  
 Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length  
 In matted grass, that with a livelier green  
 195 Betrays the secret of their silent course.  
 Nature inanimate employs sweet sounds,  
 But animated nature sweeter still,  
 To soothe and satisfy the human ear.  
 Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one  
 200 The livelong night: nor these alone, whose notes  
 Nice-fingered art<sup>3</sup> must emulate in vain,  
 But cawing rooks, and kites that swim sublime  
 In still repeated circles, screaming loud,  
 The jay, the pie,<sup>o</sup> and even the boding owl  
 205 That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.  
 Sounds inharmonious in themselves and harsh,  
 Yet heard in scenes where peace forever reigns,  
 And only there, please highly for their sake.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Mary Unwin. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The village of Olney, where Cowper and Mary Unwin were living, is situated on the river Ouse. [Return to reference 2](#)



- Note 3: Refined skill, such as that of a flutist imitating the nightingale's song. [Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *magpie* [Return to reference °](#)

[CRAZY KATE]

There often wanders one, whom better days  
Saw better clad, in cloak of satin trimmed  
535 With lace, and hat with splendid ribband bound.  
A servingmaid was she, and fell in love  
With one who left her, went to sea, and died.  
Her fancy followed him through foaming waves  
To distant shores; and she would sit and weep  
540 At what a sailor suffers; fancy, too,  
Delusive most where warmest wishes are,  
Would oft anticipate his glad return,  
And dream of transports she was not to know.  
She heard the doleful tidings of his death—  
545 And never smiled again! And now she roams  
The dreary waste; there spends the livelong day,  
And there, unless when charity forbids,  
The livelong night. A tattered apron hides,  
Worn as a cloak, and hardly hides, a gown  
550 More tattered still; and both but ill conceal  
A bosom heaved with never-ceasing sighs.  
She begs an idle pin of all she meets,  
And hoards them in her sleeve; but needful food,  
Though pressed with hunger oft, or comelier clothes,  
555 Though pinched with cold, asks never.—Kate is  
crazed!

**From *Book 3***

## [THE STRICKEN DEER]

I was a stricken deer, that left the herd  
Long since; with many an arrow deep infixed  
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew  
110 To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.  
There was I found by one who had himself  
Been hurt by the archers. In his side he bore,  
And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars.  
With gentle force soliciting<sup>4</sup> the darts,  
115 He drew them forth, and healed, and bade me live.  
Since then, with few associates, in remote  
And silent woods I wander, far from those  
My former partners of the peopled scene;  
With few associates, and not wishing more.  
120 Here much I ruminate, as much I may,  
With other views of men and manners now  
Than once, and others of a life to come.  
I see that all are wanderers, gone astray  
Each in his own delusions; they are lost  
125 In chase of fancied happiness, still wooed  
And never won. Dream after dream ensues;  
And still they dream that they shall still succeed,  
And still are disappointed. Rings the world  
With the vain stir. I sum up half mankind  
130 And add two-thirds of the remaining half,  
And find the total of their hopes and fears  
Dreams, empty dreams.

## Endnotes

- Note 4: "To endeavor to draw out by the use of gentle force" (*OED*).[Return to reference 4](#)

**From *Book 4***

**[THE WINTER EVENING: A BROWN STUDY]**

Come evening once again, season of peace,  
Return sweet evening, and continue long!  
Methinks I see thee in the streaky west,  
245 With matron-step slow-moving, while the night  
Treads on thy sweeping train; one hand employed  
In letting fall the curtain of repose  
On bird and beast, the other charged for man  
With sweet oblivion of the cares of day;  
250 Not sumptuously adorned, nor needing aid  
Like homely featured night, of clustering gems;  
A star or two just twinkling on thy brow  
Suffices thee; save that the moon is thine  
No less than hers, not worn indeed on high  
255 With ostentatious pageantry, but set  
With modest grandeur in thy purple zone,<sup>5</sup>  
Resplendent less, but of an ampler round.<sup>6</sup>  
Come then and thou shalt find thy votary calm,  
Or make me so. Composure is thy gift.  
260 And whether I devote thy gentle hours  
To books, to music, or the poet's toil,  
To weaving nets for bird-alluring fruit;  
Or twining silken threads round ivory reels  
When they command whom man was born to  
265 please;<sup>7</sup>  
I slight thee not, but make thee welcome still.  
Just when our drawing rooms begin to blaze  
With lights by clear reflection multiplied  
From many a mirror, in which he of Gath,  
270 Goliath,<sup>8</sup> might have seen his giant bulk  
Whole without stooping, towering crest and all,  
My pleasures too begin. But me perhaps  
The glowing hearth may satisfy awhile

With faint illumination that uplifts  
The shadow to the ceiling, there by fits  
275 Dancing uncouthly to the quivering flame.  
Not undelightful is an hour to me  
So spent in parlor twilight; such a gloom  
Suits well the thoughtful or unthinking mind,  
The mind contemplative, with some new theme  
280 Pregnant, or indisposed alike to all.  
Laugh ye, who boast your more mercurial powers  
That never feel a stupor, know no pause,  
Nor need one. I am conscious,<sup>o</sup> and confess,  
Fearless, a soul that does not always think.  
285 Me oft has fancy ludicrous and wild  
Soothed with a waking dream of houses, towers,  
Trees, churches, and strange visages expressed  
In the red cinders, while with poring eye  
I gazed, myself creating what I saw.  
290 Nor less amused have I quiescent watched  
The sooty films that play upon the bars,<sup>9</sup>  
Pendulous and foreboding, in the view  
Of superstition prophesying still,  
Though still deceived, some stranger's near  
295 approach.<sup>1</sup>  
'Tis thus the understanding takes repose  
In indolent vacuity of thought,  
And sleeps and is refreshed. Meanwhile the face  
Conceals the mood lethargic with a mask  
Of deep deliberation, as<sup>o</sup> the man  
300 Were tasked to his full strength, absorbed and lost.  
Thus oft reclined at ease, I lose an hour  
At evening, till at length the freezing blast  
That sweeps the bolted shutter, summons home  
The recollected powers, and snapping short  
305 The glassy threads with which the fancy weaves  
Her brittle toys, restores me to myself.

How calm is my recess, and how the frost,  
 Raging abroad, and the rough wind, endear  
 The silence and the warmth enjoyed within.  
 310 I saw the woods and fields at close of day,  
 A variegated show; the meadows green,  
 Though faded; and the lands where lately waved  
 The golden harvest, of a mellow brown,  
 Upturned so lately by the forceful share.<sup>o</sup>  
 315 I saw far off the weedy fallows<sup>2</sup> smile  
 With verdure not unprofitable, grazed  
 By flocks fast feeding and selecting each  
 His favorite herb; while all the leafless groves  
 That skirt the horizon wore a sable hue,  
 320 Scarce noticed in the kindred dusk of eve.  
 Tomorrow brings a change, a total change!  
 Which even now, though silently performed  
 And slowly, and by most unfelt, the face  
 Of universal nature undergoes.  
 325 Fast falls a fleecy shower. The downy flakes,  
 Descending and with never-ceasing lapse,<sup>3</sup>  
 Softly alighting upon all below,  
 Assimilate all objects. Earth receives  
 Gladly the thickening mantle, and the green  
 330 And tender blade that feared the chilling blast,  
 Escapes unhurt beneath so warm a veil.

## Endnotes

1785

- Note 5: Encircling band. Evening is seen both as a personified goddess, whose "zone" is her royal belt, and as a natural phenomenon, where the "zone" is a stripe of color in the sky.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The moon looks larger at evening, when just over the horizon, than at night, when it is higher and brighter.[Return to reference 6](#)



- Note 7: That is, women.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Goliath, the giant of Gath slain by David (1 Samuel 17:19–51).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The grate of a fireplace.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The piece of soot that often flaps on the bars of a grate was called a “stranger” and was supposed to portend an unexpected visitor. Compare lines 272–310 with Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Plowed but unseeded land.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Gentle downward glide.[Return to reference 3](#)

## Notes

- °: *conscious of*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *as if*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plowshare*[Return to reference °](#)

# The Castaway

Obscurest night involved the sky,  
The Atlantic billows roared,  
When such a destined wretch as I,  
Washed headlong from on board,  
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,  
5 His floating home forever left.

No braver chief<sup>1</sup> could Albion boast  
Than he with whom he went,  
Nor ever ship left Albion's coast,  
With warmer wishes sent.  
10 He loved them both, but both in vain,  
Nor him beheld, nor her again.

Not long beneath the whelming brine,  
Expert to swim, he lay;  
Nor soon he felt his strength decline,  
15 Or courage die away;  
But waged with death a lasting strife,  
Supported by despair of life.

He shouted; nor his friends had failed  
To check the vessel's course,  
20 But so the furious blast prevailed,  
That, pitiless perforce,  
They left their outcast mate behind,  
And scudded still before the wind.

Some succor yet they could afford;  
And, such as storms allow,  
25 The cask, the coop, the floated cord,

Delayed not to bestow.  
But he (they knew) nor ship, nor shore,  
Whate'er they gave, should visit more.

30 Nor, cruel as it seemed, could he  
Their haste himself condemn,  
Aware that flight, in such a sea,  
Alone could rescue them;  
Yet bitter felt it still to die

35 Deserted, and his friends so nigh.

He long survives, who lives an hour  
In ocean, self-upheld;  
And so long he, with unspent power,  
His destiny repelled;

40 And ever, as the minutes flew,  
Entreated help, or cried, "Adieu!"

At length, his transient respite past,  
His comrades, who before  
Had heard his voice in every blast,

45 Could catch the sound no more.  
For then, by toil subdued, he drank  
The stifling wave, and then he sank.

No poet wept him; but the page  
Of narrative sincere,

50 That tells his name, his worth, his age,  
Is wet with Anson's tear.  
And tears by bards or heroes shed  
Alike immortalize the dead.

55 I therefore purpose not, or dream,  
Descanting on his fate,  
To give the melancholy theme  
A more enduring date:

60 But misery still delights to trace  
Its semblance in another's case.

No voice divine the storm allayed,  
No light propitious shone,  
When, snatched from all effectual aid,  
We perished, each alone;  
65 But I beneath a rougher sea,  
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.

1799 **Endnotes**

1803

- Note 1: George, Lord Anson (1697–1762), in whose *Voyage* (1748) Cowper, years before writing this poem, had read the story of the sailor washed overboard in a storm. [Return to reference 1](#)

**OLAUDAH EQUIANO**  
**ca. 1745–1797**



**Abolitionist Medallion.** In 1787, the factory of master potter Josiah Wedgwood produced this jasperware medallion, a little over one inch in diameter, to advocate for the emerging abolitionist movement. Soon it became a fashionable ornament, adorning hairpins, necklaces, and other items worn by those wishing to signal their support for the parliamentary campaign in the late 1780s to end the British trade in enslaved Africans, which would not be successful until 1807.

---

*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, published in 1789, is the classic story of an eighteenth-century African's descent into slavery and rise to freedom. Equiano describes how he was raised in an Ibo village (in modern Nigeria), kidnapped by African raiders, and sold into slavery. Particularly powerful is his account of the horrors of the Middle Passage to Barbados in the Caribbean. There, an English naval officer took him to serve as a cabin boy and renamed him Gustavus Vassa, after a sixteenth-century Swedish hero who freed his people from the Danes (such names concealed the status of enslavement, because slavery was frowned on by the British Navy). During years at sea, as well as a period at a London school, Equiano acquired a basic education. He also underwent baptism, a ritual that many enslaved people expected to make them free. But his hopes were cruelly disappointed when, after six years' service, he was suddenly transferred to another enslaver for payment and shipped to the West Indies. There a Quaker merchant, Robert King, held him enslaved, employed him as a clerk and a seaman, and eventually allowed him, in 1766, to buy his freedom. Equiano went back to England, working first as a hairdresser and later voyaging all over the world, even taking part in an effort to find a passage to India by way of the North Pole. Equiano's recent biographer, Vincent Carretta, has raised doubts about the account that the *Interesting Narrative* gives of the early parts of Equiano's life: parish and British naval records indicate he was born not in Africa but in South Carolina and hence did not himself undergo the Middle Passage. Whether fact or fiction

—scholars may never determine conclusively—his description of his days in Africa, abduction, and suffering in the enslaver's ship gives a voice to countless Africans who faced such experiences and dramatizes the undeniable realities of the trade to a White readership. Equiano's publication of his story was the culmination of his involvement in the abolitionist movement through the 1780s and was an important contribution to that movement, not only for its explicit arguments against the trade in enslaved people but also for his self-presentation as a humane, strong, intelligent, Christian man of African descent, and a free and eloquent British subject. The book went through many editions and made Equiano famous. He married an Englishwoman, fathered two daughters, and died in London in 1797.

The *Interesting Narrative* combines several literary genres. It is a captivity narrative, a spiritual autobiography, a travel memoir, an adventure story, and an abolitionist tract. The early chapters describe the healthy, cheerful, and virtuous life of Africans, contrasted with European inhumanity, and the later chapters show how much a Black man can achieve, when given a chance. Equiano does not disguise the strains of his position as he is pulled between different identities and different worlds. His main purpose, however, is clearly to force his readers to face the ordeals an enslaved person must endure—to live in his skin. If Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* taught Europeans to sympathize with Africans, Equiano taught them that a Black man could speak for himself.

***From The Interesting Narrative of the Life  
of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa,  
the African, Written by Himself***



### **[ *The Dedication to Parliament* ]**

To the Lords Spiritual and Temporal,<sup>1</sup> and the Commons of the Parliament of Great Britain. *My Lords and Gentlemen,*

Permit me, with the greatest deference and respect, to lay at your feet the following genuine narrative; the chief design of which is to excite in your august assemblies a sense of compassion for the miseries which the slave-trade has entailed on my unfortunate countrymen. By the horrors of that trade was I first torn away from all the tender connexions that were naturally dear to my heart; but these, through the mysterious ways of Providence, I ought to regard as infinitely more than compensated by the introduction I have thence obtained to the knowledge of the Christian religion, and of a nation which, by its liberal sentiments, its humanity, the glorious freedom of its government, and its proficiency in arts and sciences, has exalted the dignity of human nature.

I am sensible I ought to entreat your pardon for addressing to you a work so wholly devoid of literary merit; but, as the production of an unlettered African, who is actuated by the hope of becoming an instrument towards the relief of his suffering countrymen, I trust that *such a man*, pleading in *such a cause*, will be acquitted of boldness and presumption.

May the God of heaven inspire your hearts with peculiar benevolence on that important day when the question of abolition is to be discussed,<sup>2</sup> when thousands, in consequence of your determination, are to look for happiness or misery!

I am,

My Lords and Gentlemen,

Your most obedient,

And devoted humble servant,

Olaudah Equiano,

or

Gustavus Vassa.

Union-Street, Mary-le-bone,<sup>3</sup>

March 24, 1789.

## Endnotes

- Note 1: In the 18th century, the House of Lords included both bishops of the Church of England and peers of the realm with inherited titles.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The parliamentary campaigner against the trade in enslaved people, William Wilberforce (1759–1833), made his first speech for abolition in May 1789, some two months after Equiano dated his dedication. The first bill to abolish the trade was deferred until 1790, when it was voted down. “Peculiar”: remarkable, distinctive.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Equiano’s address in London.[Return to reference 3](#)

## ***From Chapter 1***

### **[LIFE IN AFRICA]**

I believe it is difficult for those who publish their own memoirs to escape the imputation of vanity; nor is this the only disadvantage under which they labor: it is also their misfortune, that what is uncommon is rarely, if ever, believed, and what is obvious we are apt to turn from with disgust, and to charge the writer with impertinence. People generally think those memoirs only worthy to be read or remembered which abound in great or striking events, those, in short, which in a high degree excite either admiration or pity: all others they consign to contempt and oblivion. It is therefore, I confess, not a little hazardous in a private and obscure individual,<sup>4</sup> and a stranger too, thus to solicit the indulgent attention of the public; especially when I own I offer here the history of neither a saint, a hero, nor a tyrant. I believe there are few events in my life, which have not happened to many: it is true the incidents of it are numerous; and, did I consider myself an European, I might say my sufferings were great: but when I compare my lot with that of most of my countrymen, I regard myself as a *particular favorite of Heaven*, and acknowledge the mercies of Providence in every occurrence of my life. If then the following narrative does not appear sufficiently interesting<sup>5</sup> to engage general attention, let my motive be some excuse for its publication. I am not so foolishly vain as to expect from it either immortality or literary reputation. If it affords any satisfaction to my numerous friends, at whose request it has been written, or in the smallest degree promotes the interests of humanity, the ends for which it was undertaken will be fully attained, and every wish of my heart gratified. Let it therefore be remembered, that, in wishing to avoid censure, I do not aspire to praise.

That part of Africa, known by the name of Guinea, to which the trade for slaves is carried on, extends along the coast above 3400 miles, from the Senegal to Angola, and includes a variety of

kingdoms. Of these the most considerable is the kingdom of Benin, both as to extent and wealth, the richness and cultivation of the soil, the power of its king, and the number and warlike disposition of the inhabitants. It is situated nearly under the line,<sup>6</sup> and extends along the coast about 170 miles, but runs back into the interior part of Africa to a distance hitherto I believe unexplored by any traveler; and seems only terminated at length by the empire of Abyssinia,<sup>7</sup> near 1500 miles from its beginning. This kingdom is divided into many provinces or districts: in one of the most remote and fertile of which, called Eboe, I was born, in the year 1745, in a charming fruitful vale, named Essaka.<sup>8</sup> The distance of this province from the capital of Benin and the sea coast must be very considerable; for I had never heard of white men or Europeans, nor of the sea: and our subjection to the king of Benin was little more than nominal; for every transaction of the government, as far as my slender observation extended, was conducted by the chiefs or elders of the place.

\* \* \*

We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets. Thus every great event, such as a triumphant return from battle, or other cause of public rejoicing, is celebrated in public dances, which are accompanied with songs and music suited to the occasion. The assembly is separated into four divisions, which dance either apart or in succession, and each with a character peculiar to itself. The first division contains the married men, who in their dances frequently exhibit feats of arms, and the representation of a battle. To these succeed the married women, who dance in the second division. The young men occupy the third; and the maidens the fourth. Each represents some interesting scene of real life, such as a great achievement, domestic employment, a pathetic story, or some rural sport; and as the subject is generally founded on some recent event, it is therefore ever new. This gives our dances a spirit and variety which I have scarcely seen elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> We have many

musical instruments, particularly drums of different kinds, a piece of music which resembles a guitar, and another much like a stickado.<sup>1</sup> These last are chiefly used by betrothed virgins, who play on them on all grand festivals.

As our manners are simple, our luxuries are few. The dress of both sexes is nearly the same. It generally consists of a long piece of calico, or muslin, wrapped loosely round the body, somewhat in the form of a highland plaid.<sup>2</sup> This is usually dyed blue, which is our favorite color. It is extracted from a berry, and is brighter and richer than any I have seen in Europe. Besides this, our women of distinction wear golden ornaments; which they dispose with some profusion on their arms and legs. When our women are not employed with the men in tillage, their usual occupation is spinning and weaving cotton, which they afterwards dye, and make it into garments. They also manufacture earthen vessels, of which we have many kinds. Among the rest tobacco pipes, made after the same fashion, and used in the same manner, as those in Turkey.<sup>3</sup>

Our manner of living is entirely plain; for as yet the natives are unacquainted with those refinements in cookery which debase the taste: bullocks,<sup>4</sup> goats, and poultry supply the greatest part of their food. These constitute likewise the principal wealth of the country, and the chief articles of its commerce. The flesh is usually stewed in a pan; to make it savory we sometimes use also pepper, and other spices, and we have salt made of wood ashes. Our vegetables are mostly plantains, eadas,<sup>5</sup> yams, beans, and Indian corn. The head of the family usually eats alone; his wives and slaves have also their separate tables. Before we taste food we always wash our hands: indeed our cleanliness on all occasions is extreme; but on this it is an indispensable ceremony. After washing, libation is made, by pouring out a small portion of the food, in a certain place, for the spirits of departed relations, which the natives suppose to preside over their conduct, and guard them from evil. They are totally unacquainted with strong or spirituous liquors; and their principal beverage is palm wine. This is gotten from a tree of that name by tapping it at the top, and fastening a large gourd to it; and

sometimes one tree will yield three or four gallons in a night. When just drawn it is of a most delicious sweetness; but in a few days it acquires a tartish and more spirituous flavor: though I never saw any one intoxicated by it. The same tree also produces nuts and oil. Our principal luxury is in perfumes; one sort of these is an odoriferous wood of delicious fragrance: the other a kind of earth; a small portion of which thrown into the fire diffuses a most powerful odor.<sup>6</sup> We beat this wood into powder, and mix it with palm oil; with which both men and women perfume themselves.

In our buildings we study convenience rather than ornament. Each master of a family has a large square piece of ground, surrounded with a moat or fence, or enclosed with a wall made of red earth tempered; which, when dry, is as hard as brick. Within this are his houses to accommodate his family and slaves; which, if numerous, frequently present the appearance of a village. In the middle stands the principal building, appropriated to the sole use of the master, and consisting of two apartments; in one of which he sits in the day with his family, the other is left apart for the reception of his friends. He has besides these a distinct apartment in which he sleeps, together with his male children. On each side are the apartments of his wives, who have also their separate day and night houses. The habitations of the slaves and their families are distributed throughout the rest of the enclosure. These houses never exceed one story in height: they are always built of wood, or stakes driven into the ground, crossed with wattles, and neatly plastered within, and without. The roof is thatched with reeds. Our day-houses are left open at the sides; but those in which we sleep are always covered, and plastered in the inside, with a composition mixed with cow-dung, to keep off the different insects, which annoy us during the night. The walls and floors also of these are generally covered with mats. Our beds consist of a platform, raised three or four feet from the ground, on which are laid skins, and different parts of a spongy tree called plantain. Our covering is calico or muslin, the same as our dress. The usual seats are a few logs of wood; but we have benches, which are generally perfumed, to accommodate

strangers: these compose the greater part of our household furniture. Houses so constructed and furnished require but little skill to erect them. Every man is a sufficient architect for the purpose. The whole neighborhood afford their unanimous assistance in building them and in return receive and expect no other recompense than a feast.

As we live in a country where nature is prodigal of her favors, our wants are few and easily supplied; of course we have few manufactures. They consist for the most part of calicoes, earthenware, ornaments, and instruments of war and husbandry. But these make no part of our commerce, the principal articles of which, as I have observed, are provisions. In such a state money is of little use; however we have some small pieces of coin, if I may call them such. They are made something like an anchor; but I do not remember either their value or denomination. We have also markets, at which I have been frequently with my mother. These are sometimes visited by stout mahogany-colored men from the southwest of us: we call them Oye-Eboe, which term signifies red men living at a distance. They generally bring us firearms, gunpowder, hats, beads, and dried fish. The last we esteemed a great rarity, as our waters were only brooks and springs. These articles they barter with us for odoriferous woods and earth, and our salt of wood ashes. They always carry slaves through our land; but the strictest account is exacted of their manner of procuring them before they are suffered to pass. Sometimes indeed we sold slaves to them, but they were only prisoners of war, or such among us as had been convicted of kidnapping, or adultery, and some other crimes, which we esteemed heinous. This practice of kidnapping induces me to think, that, notwithstanding all our strictness, their principal business among us was to trepan<sup>2</sup> our people. I remember too they carried great sacks along with them, which not long after I had an opportunity of fatally seeing applied to that infamous purpose.

Our land is uncommonly rich and fruitful, and produces all kinds of vegetables in great abundance. We have plenty of Indian corn,

and vast quantities of cotton and tobacco. Our pineapples grow without culture; they are about the size of the largest sugarloaf,<sup>8</sup> and finely flavored. We have also spices of different kinds, particularly pepper; and a variety of delicious fruits which I have never seen in Europe; together with gums of various kinds, and honey in abundance. All our industry is exerted to improve those blessings of nature. Agriculture is our chief employment; and everyone, even the children and women, are engaged in it. Thus we are all habituated to labor from our earliest years. Every one contributes something to the common stock; and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggars. The benefits of such a mode of living are obvious. The West India planters prefer the slaves of Benin or Eboe to those of any other part of Guinea, for their hardiness, intelligence, integrity, and zeal. Those benefits are felt by us in the general healthiness of the people, and in their vigor and activity; I might have added too in their comeliness. Deformity is indeed unknown amongst us, I mean that of shape. Numbers of the natives of Eboe now in London might be brought in support of this assertion: for, in regard to complexion, ideas of beauty are wholly relative. I remember while in Africa to have seen three negro children, who were tawny, and another quite white, who were universally regarded by myself, and the natives in general, as far as related to their complexions, as deformed. Our women too were in my eyes at least uncommonly graceful, alert, and modest to a degree of bashfulness; nor do I remember to have ever heard of an instance of incontinence<sup>9</sup> amongst them before marriage. They are also remarkably cheerful. Indeed cheerfulness and affability are two of the leading characteristics of our nation.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 4: A person unknown to the public.[Return to reference 4](#)



- Note 5: As in his title, Equiano uses the term *interesting* in a literal sense (common in the 18th century) of “capable of winning people over to one’s interest,” as well as “fascinating” or “engaging.”[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Nearly at the equator. The Kingdom of Benin in the 18th century (not to be confused with the modern-day Republic of Benin) was located just north of the equator in what is now Nigeria.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Another name for the Ethiopian Empire in East Africa.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Village in the eastern part of what is now Nigeria. “Eboe”: another spelling of Igbo or Ibo, an ethnic group whose homeland occupies territory in what is now Nigeria.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: When I was in Smyrna I have frequently seen the Greeks dance after this manner [*Equiano’s note*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Also spelled “sticcado,” an instrument like a xylophone.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, a kilt, worn in the Scottish Highlands.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The bowl is earthen, curiously figured, to which a long reed is fixed as a tube. This tube is sometimes so long as to be borne by one, and frequently out of grandeur, by two boys [*Equiano’s note*].[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Steers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Also spelled “eddoes,” a tropical root vegetable.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: When I was in Smyrna I saw the same kind of earth, and brought some of it with me to England; it resembles musk in strength, but is more delicious in scent, and is not unlike the smell of a rose [*Equiano’s note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Entrap, ensnare.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cylindrical form in which refined sugar was most often sold until the late 19th century; the largest were about 30

inches high. "Without culture": without being cultivated.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Sexual immorality.[Return to reference 9](#)

## ***From Chapter II***

### **[ABDUCTION AND CAPTIVITY]**

I hope the reader will not think I have trespassed on his patience in introducing myself to him with some account of the manners and customs of my country. They had been implanted in me with great care, and made an impression on my mind, which time could not erase, and which all the adversity and variety of fortune I have since experienced served only to rivet and record; for, whether the love of one's country be real or imaginary, or a lesson of reason, or an instinct of nature, I still look back with pleasure on the first scenes of my life, though that pleasure has been for the most part mingled with sorrow.

I have already acquainted the reader with the time and place of my birth. My father, besides many slaves, had a numerous family, of which seven lived to grow up, including myself and a sister, who was the only daughter. As I was the youngest of the sons, I became, of course, the greatest favorite with my mother, and was always with her; and she used to take particular pains to form my mind. I was trained up from my earliest years in the art of war; my daily exercise was shooting and throwing javelins; and my mother adorned me with emblems, after the manner of our greatest warriors. In this way I grew up till I was turned the age of eleven, when an end was put to my happiness in the following manner:—Generally when the grown people in the neighborhood were gone far in the fields to labor, the children assembled together in some of the neighbors' premises to play; and commonly some of us used to get up a tree to look out for any assailant, or kidnapper, that might come upon us; for they sometimes took those opportunities of our parents' absence to attack and carry off as many as they could seize. One day, as I was watching at the top of a tree in our yard, I saw one of those people come into the yard of our next neighbor but one, to kidnap, there being many stout young people in it. Immediately on this I gave the alarm of the rogue, and he was surrounded by the stoutest

of them, who entangled him with cords, so that he could not escape till some of the grown people came and secured him. But alas! ere long it was my fate to be thus attacked, and to be carried off, when none of the grown people were nigh. One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both, and, without giving us time to cry out, or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, and ran off with us into the nearest wood. Here they tied our hands, and continued to carry us as far as they could, till night came on, when we reached a small house, where the robbers halted for refreshment, and spent the night. We were then unbound, but were unable to take any food; and, being quite overpowered by fatigue and grief, our only relief was some sleep, which allayed our misfortune for a short time. The next morning we left the house, and continued travelling all the day. For a long time we had kept the woods, but at last we came into a road which I believed I knew. I had now some hopes of being delivered; for we had advanced but a little way before I discovered some people at a distance, on which I began to cry out for their assistance: but my cries had no other effect than to make them tie me faster and stop my mouth, and then they put me into a large sack. They also stopped my sister's mouth, and tied her hands; and in this manner we proceeded till we were out of the sight of these people. When we went to rest the following night they offered us some victuals; but we refused it; and the only comfort we had was in being in one another's arms all that night, and bathing each other with our tears. But alas! we were soon deprived of even the small comfort of weeping together. The next day proved a day of greater sorrow than I had yet experienced; for my sister and I were then separated, while we lay clasped in each other's arms. It was in vain that we besought them not to part us; she was torn from me, and immediately carried away, while I was left in a state of distraction not to be described. I cried and grieved continually; and for several days I did not eat anything but what they forced into my mouth. At length, after many days travelling, during which I had often changed masters, I got into the hands of a

chieftain, in a very pleasant country. This man had two wives and some children, and they all used<sup>1</sup> me extremely well, and did all they could to comfort me; particularly the first wife, who was something like my mother. Although I was a great many days' journey from my father's house, yet these people spoke exactly the same language with us.

\* \* \*

From the time I left my own nation I always found somebody that understood me till I came to the sea coast. The languages of different nations did not totally differ, nor were they so copious<sup>2</sup> as those of the Europeans, particularly the English. They were therefore easily learned; and, while I was journeying thus through Africa, I acquired two or three different tongues. In this manner I had been travelling for a considerable time, when one evening, to my great surprise, whom should I see brought to the house where I was but my dear sister! As soon as she saw me she gave a loud shriek, and ran into my arms—I was quite overpowered: neither of us could speak; but, for a considerable time, clung to each other in mutual embraces, unable to do anything but weep. Our meeting affected all who saw us; and indeed I must acknowledge, in honor of those sable destroyers of human rights,<sup>3</sup> that I never met with any ill treatment, or saw any offered to their slaves, except tying them, when necessary, to keep them from running away. When these people knew we were brother and sister they indulged us together; and the man, to whom I supposed we belonged, lay with us, he in the middle, while she and I held one another by the hands across his breast all night; and thus for a while we forgot our misfortunes in the joy of being together: but even this small comfort was soon to have an end; for scarcely had the fatal morning appeared, when she was again torn from me forever! I was now more miserable, if possible, than before. The small relief which her presence gave me from pain was gone, and the wretchedness of my situation was redoubled by my anxiety after her fate, and my apprehensions lest her sufferings should be greater than mine, when I could not be

with her to alleviate them. Yes, thou dear partner of all my childish sports! thou sharer of my joys and sorrows! happy should I have ever esteemed myself to encounter every misery for you, and to procure your freedom by the sacrifice of my own. Though you were early forced from my arms, your image has been always rivetted in my heart, from which neither *time nor fortune* have been able to remove it; so that, while the thoughts of your sufferings have damped my prosperity, they have mingled with adversity and increased its bitterness. To that Heaven which protects the weak from the strong, I commit the care of your innocence and virtues, if they have not already received their full reward, and if your youth and delicacy have not long since fallen victims to the violence of the African trader, the pestilential stench of a Guinea ship, the seasoning<sup>4</sup> in the European colonies, or the lash and lust of a brutal and unrelenting overseer.

\* \* \*

Thus I continued to travel, sometimes by land, sometimes by water, through different countries and various nations, till, at the end of six or seven months after I had been kidnapped, I arrived at the sea coast. It would be tedious and uninteresting to relate all the incidents which befell me during this journey, and which I have not yet forgotten; of the various hands I passed through, and the manners and customs of all the different people among whom I lived: I shall therefore only observe, that in all the places where I was the soil was exceedingly rich; the pumpkins, eadas, plantains, yams, &c. &c. were in great abundance, and of incredible size. There were also vast quantities of different gums, though not used for any purpose; and everywhere a great deal of tobacco. The cotton even grew quite wild; and there was plenty of redwood. I saw no mechanics<sup>5</sup> whatever in all the way, except such as I have mentioned. The chief employment in all these countries was agriculture, and both the males and females, as with us, were brought up to it, and trained in the arts of war. \* \* \*

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were sound by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, (which was very different from any I had ever heard) united to confirm me in this belief. Indeed such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment, that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country. When I looked round the ship too and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little I found some black people about me, who I believe were some of those who brought me on board, and had been receiving their pay; they talked to me in order to cheer me, but all in vain. I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and loose hair. They told me I was not; and one of the crew brought me a small portion of spirituous liquor in a wine glass; but, being afraid of him, I would not take it out of his hand. One of the blacks therefore took it from him and gave it to me, and I took a little down my palate, which, instead of reviving me, as they thought it would, threw me into the greatest consternation at the strange feeling it produced, having never tasted any such liquor before. Soon after this the blacks who brought me on board went off, and left me abandoned to despair. I now saw myself deprived of all chance of returning to my native country, or even the least glimpse of hope of gaining the shore, which I now considered as friendly; and I even wished for my former slavery in preference to my present situation, which was filled with horrors of every kind, still heightened by my

ignorance of what I was to undergo. I was not long suffered to indulge my grief; I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life; so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste any thing. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across I think the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. I had never experienced any thing of this kind before; and although, not being used to the water, I naturally feared that element the first time I saw it, yet nevertheless, could I have got over the nettings,<sup>6</sup> I would have jumped over the side, but I could not; and, besides, the crew used to watch us very closely who were not chained down to the decks, lest we should leap into the water; and I have seen some of these poor African prisoners most severely cut for attempting to do so, and hourly whipped for not eating. This indeed was often the case with myself. In a little time after, amongst the poor chained men, I found some of my own nation, which in a small degree gave ease to my mind. I inquired of these what was to be done with us; they gave me to understand we were to be carried to these white people's country to work for them. I then was a little revived, and thought, if it were no worse than working, my situation was not so desperate: but still I feared I should be put to death, the white people looked and acted, as I thought, in so savage a manner; for I had never seen among any people such instances of brutal cruelty; and this not only shewn towards us blacks, but also to some of the whites themselves. One white man in particular I saw, when we were permitted to be on deck, flogged so unmercifully with a large rope near the foremast, that he died in consequence of it; and they tossed him over the side as they would have done a brute. This made me fear these people the more; and I expected nothing less than to be treated in the same manner. I could not help expressing my fears and apprehensions to some of my countrymen: I asked



them if these people had no country, but lived in this hollow place (the ship): they told me they did not, but came from a distant one. "Then," said I, "how comes it in all our country we never heard of them?" They told me because they lived so very far off. I then asked where were their women? had they any like themselves? I was told they had: "and why," said I, "do we not see them?" they answered, because they were left behind. I asked how the vessel could go? they told me they could not tell; but that there were cloths put upon the masts by the help of the ropes I saw, and then the vessel went on; and the white men had some spell or magic they put in the water when they liked in order to stop the vessel. I was exceedingly amazed at this account, and really thought they were spirits. I therefore wished much to be from amongst them, for I expected they would sacrifice me: but my wishes were vain; for we were so quartered that it was impossible for any of us to make our escape. While we stayed on the coast I was mostly on deck; and one day, to my great astonishment, I saw one of these vessels coming in with the sails up. As soon as the whites saw it, they gave a great shout, at which we were amazed; and the more so as the vessel appeared larger by approaching nearer. At last she came to an anchor in my sight, and when the anchor was let go I and my countrymen who saw it were lost in astonishment to observe the vessel stop; and were now convinced it was done by magic. Soon after this the other ship got her boats out, and they came on board of us, and the people of both ships seemed very glad to see each other. Several of the strangers also shook hands with us black people, and made motions with their hands, signifying I suppose we were to go to their country; but we did not understand them. At last, when the ship we were in had got in all her cargo, they made ready with many fearful noises, and we were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel. But this disappointment was the least of my sorrow. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the

place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs,<sup>7</sup> into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable. Happily perhaps for myself I was soon reduced so low here that it was thought necessary to keep me almost always on deck; and from<sup>8</sup> my extreme youth I was not put in fetters. In this situation I expected every hour to share the fate of my companions, some of whom were almost daily brought upon deck at the point of death, which I began to hope would soon put an end to my miseries. Often did I think many of the inhabitants of the deep much more happy than myself. I envied them the freedom they enjoyed, and as often wished I could change my condition for theirs. Every circumstance I met with served only to render my state more painful, and heighten my apprehensions, and my opinion of the cruelty of the whites. One day they had taken a number of fishes; and when they had killed and satisfied themselves with as many as they thought fit, to our astonishment who were on the deck, rather than give any of them to us to eat as we expected, they tossed the remaining fish into the sea again, although we begged and prayed for some as well as we could, but in vain; and some of my countrymen, being pressed by hunger, took an opportunity, when they thought no one saw them, of trying to get a little privately; but they were discovered, and the attempt procured them some very severe floggings.

One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen who were chained together (I was near them at the time), preferring death to such a life of misery,

somehow made through the nettings and jumped into the sea; immediately another quite dejected fellow, who, on account of his illness, was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example; and I believe many more would very soon have done the same if they had not been prevented by the ship's crew, who were instantly alarmed. Those of us that were the most active were in a moment put down under the deck, and there was such a noise and confusion amongst the people of the ship as I never heard before, to stop her, and get the boat out to go after the slaves. However two of the wretches were drowned, but they got the other, and afterwards flogged him unmercifully for thus attempting to prefer death to slavery. In this manner we continued to undergo more hardships than I can now relate, hardships which are inseparable from this accursed trade. Many a time we were near suffocation from the want of fresh air, which we were often without for whole days together. This, and the stench of the necessary tubs, carried off many. During our passage I first saw flying fishes, which surprised me very much: they used frequently to fly across the ship, and many of them fell on the deck. I also now first saw the use of the quadrant; I had often with astonishment seen the mariners make observations with it, and I could not think what it meant. They at last took notice of my surprise; and one of them, willing to increase it, as well as to gratify my curiosity, made me one day look through it. The clouds appeared to me to be land, which disappeared as they passed along. This heightened my wonder; and I was now more persuaded than ever that I was in another world, and that every thing about me was magic. At last we came in sight of the island of Barbados,<sup>9</sup> at which the whites on board gave a great shout, and made many signs of joy to us. We did not know what to think of this; but as the vessel drew nearer we plainly saw the harbor, and other ships of different kinds and sizes; and we soon anchored amongst them off Bridge Town. Many merchants and planters now came on board, though it was in the evening. They put us in separate parcels,<sup>1</sup> and examined us attentively. They also made us jump, and pointed to the land, signifying we were to go there. We thought by this we should be

eaten by these ugly men, as they appeared to us; and, when soon after we were all put down under the deck again, there was much dread and trembling among us, and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all the night from these apprehensions, insomuch that at last the white people got some old slaves from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten, but to work, and were soon to go on land, where we should see many of our country people. This report eased us much; and sure enough, soon after we were landed, there came to us Africans of all languages. We were conducted immediately to the merchant's yard, where we were pent up altogether like so many sheep in a fold, without regard to sex or age. As every object was new to me, every thing I saw filled me with surprise. What struck me first was that the houses were built with stories, and in every other respect different from those in Africa; but I was still more astonished on seeing people on horseback. I did not know what this could mean; and indeed I thought these people were full of nothing but magical arts. While I was in this astonishment one of my fellow prisoners spoke to a countryman of his about the horses, who said they were the same kind they had in their country. I understood them, though they were from a distant part of Africa, and I thought it odd I had not seen any horses there; but afterwards, when I came to converse with different Africans, I found they had many horses amongst them, and much larger than those I then saw. We were not many days in the merchant's custody before we were sold after their usual manner, which is this:—On a signal given (as the beat of a drum) the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make a choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamor with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers, serve not a little to increase the apprehensions of the terrified Africans, who may well be supposed to consider them as the ministers of that destruction to which they think themselves devoted.<sup>2</sup> In this manner, without scruple, are relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again. I remember in the vessel in which I was brought over,

in the men's apartment, there were several brothers, who, in the sale, were sold in different lots; and it was very moving on this occasion to see and hear their cries at parting. O, ye nominal Christians! might not an African ask you, learned you this from your God, who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you? Is it not enough that we are torn from our country and friends to toil for your luxury and lust of gain? Must every tender feeling be likewise sacrificed to your avarice? Are the dearest friends and relations, now rendered more dear by their separation from their kindred, still to be parted from each other, and thus prevented from cheering the gloom of slavery with the small comfort of being together and mingling their sufferings and sorrows? Why are parents to lose their children, brothers their sisters, or husbands their wives? Surely this is a new refinement in cruelty, which, while it has no advantage to atone for it, thus aggravates distress, and adds fresh horrors even to the wretchedness of slavery.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes

- Note 1: Treated.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Furnished with as large vocabularies.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, Black people who enslaved others in Africa.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The period during which enslaved Africans were forced to adjust to brutal working and living conditions in European colonies in the Western Hemisphere, which often proved fatal. "African trader": a European trader on the coast of West Africa.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: People who work with tools or machines.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A network of small ropes around the ship kept enslaved people from jumping overboard.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Latrines.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Because of.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The easternmost Caribbean island, then an important center for the trade of sugar and enslaved people.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Groups sorted to be sold as one lot.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Doomed.[Return to reference 2](#)

## ***From Chapter VII***

**[A FREE MAN]**<sup>3</sup>

Every day now brought me nearer my freedom, and I was impatient till we proceeded again to sea, that I might have an opportunity of getting a sum large enough to purchase it. I was not long ungratified; for, in the beginning of the year 1766, my master bought another sloop, named the *Nancy*, the largest I had ever seen. She was partly laden, and was to proceed to Philadelphia; our Captain had his choice of three, and I was well pleased he chose this, which was the largest; for, from his having a large vessel, I had more room, and could carry a larger quantity of goods with me. Accordingly, when we had delivered our old vessel, the *Prudence*, and completed the lading of the *Nancy*, having made near three hundred per cent, by four barrels of pork I brought from Charlestown, I laid in as large a cargo as I could, trusting to God's providence to prosper my undertaking. With these views I sailed for Philadelphia. On our passage, when we drew near the land, I was for the first time surprised at the sight of some whales, having never seen any such large sea monsters before; and as we sailed by the land one morning I saw a puppy whale close by the vessel; it was about the length of a wherry boat, and it followed us all the day till we got within the Capes. We arrived safe and in good time at Philadelphia, and I sold my goods there chiefly to the Quakers. They always appeared to be a very honest discreet sort of people, and never attempted to impose on me; I therefore liked them, and ever after chose to deal with them in preference to any others.

One Sunday morning while I was here, as I was going to church, I chanced to pass a meeting house. The doors being open, and the house full of people, it excited my curiosity to go in. When I entered the house, to my great surprise, I saw a very tall woman standing in the midst of them, speaking in an audible voice something which I could not understand. Having never seen anything of this kind before, I stood and stared about me for some time, wondering at

this odd scene. As soon as it was over I took an opportunity to make inquiry about the place and people, when I was informed they were called Quakers.<sup>4</sup> I particularly asked what that woman I saw in the midst of them had said, but none of them were pleased to satisfy me; so I quitted them, and soon after, as I was returning, I came to a church crowded with people; the church-yard was full likewise, and a number of people were even mounted on ladders, looking in at the windows. I thought this a strange sight, as I had never seen churches, either in England or the West Indies, crowded in this manner before. I therefore made bold to ask some people the meaning of all this, and they told me the Rev. Mr. George Whitfield<sup>5</sup> was preaching. I had often heard of this gentleman, and had wished to see and hear him; but I had never before had an opportunity. I now therefore resolved to gratify myself with the sight, and I pressed in amidst the multitude. When I got into the church I saw this pious man exhorting the people with the greatest fervor and earnestness, and sweating as much as I ever did while in slavery on Montserrat beach. I was very much struck and impressed with this; I thought it strange I had never seen divines exert themselves in this manner before, and I was no longer at a loss to account for the thin congregations they preached to.

When we had discharged our cargo here, and were loaded again, we left this fruitful land once more, and set sail for Montserrat. My traffic had hitherto succeeded so well with me, that I thought, by selling my goods when we arrived at Montserrat, I should have enough to purchase my freedom. But, as soon as our vessel arrived there, my master came on board, and gave orders for us to go to St. Eustatia,<sup>6</sup> and discharge our cargo there, and from thence proceed for Georgia. I was much disappointed at this; but thinking, as usual, it was of no use to murmur at the decrees of fate, I submitted without repining, and we went to St. Eustatia. After we had discharged our cargo there we took in a live cargo, as we call a cargo of slaves. Here I sold my goods tolerably well; but, not being able to lay out all my money in this small island to as much advantage as in many other places, I laid out only part, and the



remainder I brought away with me neat.<sup>7</sup> We sailed from hence for Georgia, and I was glad when we got there, though I had not much reason to like the place from my last adventure in Savannah;<sup>8</sup> but I longed to get back to Montserrat and procure my freedom, which I expected to be able to purchase when I returned. As soon as we arrived here I waited on my careful doctor, Mr. Brady, to whom I made the most grateful acknowledgments in my power for his former kindness and attention during my illness.

While we were here an odd circumstance happened to the Captain and me, which disappointed us both a good deal. A silversmith, whom we had brought to this place some voyages before, agreed with the Captain to return with us to the West Indies, and promised at the same time to give the Captain a great deal of money, having pretended to take a liking to him, and being, as we thought, very rich. But while we stayed to load our vessel this man was taken ill in a house where he worked, and in a week's time became very bad. The worse he grew the more he used to speak of giving the Captain what he had promised him, so that he expected something considerable from the death of this man, who had no wife or child, and he attended him day and night. I used also to go with the Captain, at his own desire, to attend him; especially when we saw there was no appearance of his recovery; and, in order to recompense me for my trouble, the Captain promised me ten pounds, when he should get the man's property. I thought this would be of great service to me, although I had nearly money enough to purchase my freedom, if I should get safe this voyage to Montserrat. In this expectation I laid out above eight pounds of my money for a suit of superfine clothes to dance with at my freedom, which I hoped was then at hand. We still continued to attend this man, and were with him even on the last day he lived, till very late at night, when we went on board. After we were got to bed, about one or two o'clock in the morning, the Captain was sent for, and informed the man was dead. On this he came to my bed, and, waking me, informed me of it, and desired me to get up and procure a light, and immediately go to him. I told him I was very sleepy, and

wished he would take somebody else with him, or else, as the man was dead, and could want no farther attendance, to let all things remain as they were till next morning. "No, no," said he, "we will have the money tonight, I cannot wait till tomorrow; so let us go." Accordingly I got up and struck a light, and away we both went and saw the man as dead as we could wish. The Captain said he would give him a grand burial, in gratitude for the promised treasure; and desired that all the things belonging to the deceased might be brought forth. Among others, there was a nest of trunks of which he had kept the keys whilst the man was ill, and when they were produced we opened them with no small eagerness and expectation; and as there were a great number within one another, with much impatience we took them one out of the other. At last, when we came to the smallest, and had opened it, we saw it was full of papers, which we supposed to be notes; at the sight of which our hearts leapt for joy; and that instant the Captain, clapping his hands, cried out, "Thank God, here it is." But when we took up the trunk, and began to examine the supposed treasure and long-looked-for bounty, (alas! alas! how uncertain and deceitful are all human affairs!) what had we found! While we were embracing a substance we grasped an empty nothing. The whole amount that was in the nest of trunks was only one dollar and a half; and all that the man possessed would not pay for his coffin. Our sudden and exquisite joy was now succeeded by as sudden and exquisite pain; and my Captain and I exhibited, for some time, most ridiculous figures—pictures of chagrin and disappointment! We went away greatly mortified, and left the deceased to do as well as he could for himself, as we had taken so good care of him when alive for nothing. We set sail once more for Montserrat, and arrived there safe; but much out of humor with our friend the silversmith. When we had unladen the vessel, and I had sold my venture, finding myself master of about forty-seven pounds, I consulted my true friend, the Captain, how I should proceed in offering my master the money for my freedom. He told me to come on a certain morning, when he and my master would be at breakfast together. Accordingly, on that morning I went, and met the Captain there, as he had appointed.

When I went in I made my obeisance to my master, and with my money in my hand, and many fears in my heart, I prayed him to be as good as his offer to me, when he was pleased to promise me my freedom as soon as I could purchase it. This speech seemed to confound him; he began to recoil; and my heart that instant sank within me. "What," said he, "give you your freedom? Why, where did you get the money? Have you got forty pounds sterling?" "Yes, sir," I answered. "How did you get it?" replied he. I told him, very honestly. The Captain then said he knew I got the money very honestly and with much industry, and that I was particularly careful. On which my master replied, I got money much faster than he did; and said he would not have made me the promise he did if he had thought I should have got money so soon. "Come, come," said my worthy Captain, clapping my master on the back, "Come, Robert" (which was his name), "I think you must let him have his freedom; you have laid your money out very well; you have received good interest for it all this time, and here is now the principal at last. I know Gustavus has earned you more than an hundred a-year, and he will still save you money, as he will not leave you:—Come, Robert, take the money." My master then said, he would not be worse than his promise; and, taking the money, told me to go to the Secretary at the Register Office, and get my manumission<sup>9</sup> drawn up. These words of my master were like a voice from heaven to me: in an instant all my trepidation was turned into unutterable bliss; and I most reverently bowed myself with gratitude, unable to express my feelings, but by the overflowing of my eyes, while my true and worthy friend, the Captain, congratulated us both with a peculiar degree of heartfelt pleasure. As soon as the first transports of my joy were over, and that I had expressed my thanks to these my worthy friends in the best manner I was able, I rose with a heart full of affection and reverence, and left the room, in order to obey my master's joyful mandate of going to the Register Office. As I was leaving the house I called to mind the words of the Psalmist, in the 126th Psalm, and like him, "I glorified God in my heart, in whom I trusted." These words had been impressed on my mind from the

very day I was forced from Deptford<sup>1</sup> to the present hour, and I now saw them, as I thought, fulfilled and verified. My imagination was all rapture as I flew to the Register Office, and in this respect, like the apostle Peter<sup>2</sup> (whose deliverance from prison was so sudden and extraordinary, that he thought he was in a vision), I could scarcely believe I was awake. Heavens! who could do justice to my feelings at this moment! Not conquering heroes themselves, in the midst of a triumph—Not the tender mother who had just regained her long-lost infant, and presses it to her heart—Not the weary hungry mariner, at the sight of the desired friendly port—Not the lover, when he once more embraces his beloved mistress, after she had been ravished from his arms!—All within my breast was tumult, wildness, and delirium! My feet scarcely touched the ground, for they were winged with joy, and, like Elijah, as he rose to Heaven,<sup>3</sup> they “were with lightning sped as I went on.” Every one I met I told of my happiness, and blazed about the virtue of my amiable master and captain.

When I got to the office and acquainted the Register with my errand he congratulated me on the occasion, and told me he would draw up my manumission for half price, which was a guinea. I thanked him for his kindness; and having received it and paid him, I hastened to my master to get him to sign it, that I might be fully released. Accordingly he signed the manumission that day, so that, before night, I who had been a slave in the morning, trembling at the will of another, was become my own master, and completely free. I thought this was the happiest day I had ever experienced; and my joy was still heightened by the blessings and prayers of the sable race, particularly the aged, to whom my heart had ever been attached with reverence.

As the form of my manumission has something peculiar in it, and expresses the absolute power and dominion one man claims over his fellow, I shall beg leave to present it before my readers at full length:

*Montserrat.*—To all men unto whom these presents shall come: I Robert King, of the parish of St. Anthony in the said island, merchant, send greeting: Know ye, that I the aforesaid Robert King, for and in consideration of the sum of seventy pounds current money of the said island,<sup>4</sup> to me in hand paid, and to the intent that a negro man-slave, named Gustavus Vassa, shall and may become free, have manumitted, emancipated, enfranchised, and set free, and by these presents do manumit, emancipate, enfranchise, and set free, the aforesaid negro man-slave, named Gustavus Vassa, for ever, hereby giving, granting, and releasing unto him, the said Gustavus Vassa, all right, title, dominion, sovereignty, and property, which, as lord and master over the aforesaid Gustavus Vassa, I had, or now I have, or by any means whatsoever I may or can hereafter possibly have over him the aforesaid negro, for ever. In witness whereof I the above-said Robert King have unto these presents set my hand and seal, this tenth day of July, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and sixty-six.

ROBERT KING

Signed, sealed, and delivered in the presence of Terrylegay, Montserrat.

Registered the within manumission at full length, this eleventh day of July, 1766, in liber D.<sup>5</sup>

TERRYLEGAY, REGISTER.

In short, the fair as well as black people immediately styled me by a new appellation, to me the most desirable in the world, which was Freeman, and at the dances I gave my Georgia superfine blue clothes made no indifferent appearance, as I thought. Some of the sable females, who formerly stood aloof, now began to relax and appear less coy; but my heart was still fixed on London, where I hoped to be ere long. So that my worthy captain and his owner, my late master, finding that the bent of my mind was towards London, said to me, "We hope you won't leave us, but that you will still be with the vessels." Here gratitude bowed me down; and none but the

generous mind can judge of my feelings, struggling between inclination and duty. However, notwithstanding my wish to be in London, I obediently answered my benefactors that I would go in the vessel, and not leave them; and from that day I was entered on board as an able-bodied sailor, at thirty-six shillings per month, besides what perquisites I could make.<sup>6</sup> My intention was to make a voyage or two, entirely to please these my honored patrons; but I determined that the year following, if it pleased God, I would see Old England once more, and surprise my old master, Capt. Pascal, who was hourly in my mind; for I still loved him, notwithstanding his usage of me,<sup>7</sup> and I pleased myself with thinking of what he would say when he saw what the Lord had done for me in so short a time, instead of being, as he might perhaps suppose, under the cruel yoke of some planter. With these kind of reveries I used often to entertain myself, and shorten the time till my return; and now, being as in my original free African state, I embarked on board the *Nancy*, after having got all things ready for our voyage. In this state of serenity we sailed for St. Eustatia;<sup>8</sup> and, having smooth seas and calm weather, we soon arrived there: after taking our cargo on board, we proceeded to Savannah in Georgia, in August, 1766. While we were there, as usual, I used to go for the cargo up the rivers in boats; and on this business I have been frequently beset by alligators, which were very numerous on that coast, and I have shot many of them when they have been near getting into our boats; which we have with great difficulty sometimes prevented, and have been very much frightened at them. I have seen a young one sold in Georgia alive for six pence. During our stay at this place, one evening a slave belonging to Mr. Read, a merchant of Savannah, came near our vessel, and began to use me very ill. I entreated him, with all the patience I was master of, to desist, as I knew there was little or no law for a free negro here; but the fellow, instead of taking my advice, persevered in his insults, and even struck me. At this I lost all temper, and I fell on him and beat him soundly. The next morning his master came to our vessel as we lay alongside the wharf, and desired me to come ashore that he might have me flogged all round

the town, for beating his negro slave. I told him he had insulted me, and had given the provocation, by first striking me. I had told my captain also the whole affair that morning, and wished him to have gone along with me to Mr. Read, to prevent bad consequences; but he said that it did not signify, and if Mr. Read said anything he would make matters up, and had desired me to go to work, which I accordingly did. The Captain being on board when Mr. Read came, he told him I was a free man; and when Mr. Read applied to him to deliver me up, he said he knew nothing of the matter. I was astonished and frightened at this, and thought I had better keep where I was than go ashore and be flogged round the town, without judge or jury. I therefore refused to stir; and Mr. Read went away, swearing he would bring all the constables in the town, for he would have me out of the vessel. When he was gone, I thought his threat might prove too true to my sorrow; and I was confirmed in this belief, as well by the many instances I had seen of the treatment of free negroes, as from a fact that had happened within my own knowledge here a short time before. There was a free Black man, a carpenter, that I knew, who, for asking a gentleman that he worked for for the money he had earned, was put into jail; and afterwards this oppressed man was sent from Georgia, with false accusations, of an intention to set the gentleman's house on fire, and run away with his slaves. I was therefore much embarrassed, and very apprehensive of a flogging at least. I dreaded, of all things, the thoughts of being striped,<sup>9</sup> as I never in my life had the marks of any violence of that kind. At that instant a rage seized my soul, and for a little I determined to resist the first man that should offer to lay violent hands on me, or basely use me without a trial; for I would sooner die like a free man, than suffer myself to be scourged by the hands of ruffians, and my blood drawn like a slave. The captain and others, more cautious, advised me to make haste and conceal myself; for they said Mr. Read was a very spiteful man, and he would soon come on board with constables and take me. At first I refused this counsel, being determined to stand my ground; but at length, by the prevailing entreaties of the captain and Mr. Dixon, with whom



he lodged, I went to Mr. Dixon's house, which was a little out of town, at a place called Yea-ma-chra.<sup>1</sup> I was but just gone when Mr. Read, with the constables, came for me, and searched the vessel; but, not finding me there, he swore he would have me dead or alive. I was secreted about five days; however, the good character<sup>2</sup> which my captain always gave me as well as some other gentlemen who also knew me procured me some friends. At last some of them told my captain that he did not use me well, in suffering me thus to be imposed upon, and said they would see me redressed, and get me on board some other vessel. My captain, on this, immediately went to Mr. Read, and told him, that ever since I eloped from the vessel his work had been neglected, and he could not go on with her loading, himself and mate not being well; and, as I had managed things on board for them, my absence must retard his voyage, and consequently hurt the owner; he therefore begged of him to forgive me, as he said he never had any complaint of me before, for the many years that I had been with him. After repeated entreaties, Mr. Read said I might go to hell, and that he would not meddle with me; on which my captain came immediately to me at his lodging, and, telling me how pleasantly matters had gone on, he desired me to go on board. Some of my other friends then asked him if he had got the constable's warrant from them; the captain said, No. On this I was desired by them to stay in the house; and they said they would get me on board of some other vessel before the evening. When the captain heard this he became almost distracted. He went immediately for the warrant, and, after using every exertion in his power, he at last got it from my hunters; but I had all the expenses to pay. After I had thanked all my friends for their attention, I went on board again to my work, of which I had always plenty.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes



- Note 3: Frustrated in his hope to be set free in England, Equiano is shipped to Montserrat, a British colony in the Leeward Islands of the West Indies. Robert King, a prosperous Quaker merchant from Philadelphia, pays the price set for him, treats him kindly, and values him as a reliable worker. By being useful to a friendly sea captain, Thomas Farmer, Equiano has opportunities to travel and trade goods for money. Eventually King promises to let him purchase his freedom for his original cost: £40.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Quaker meetings are not led by clergy; any worshipper who feels inspired by God can rise to speak.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Whitefield (1714–1770), a famous evangelist who helped found Methodism, was in Britain, not Philadelphia, in 1766. It is possible that Equiano had heard him preach the previous year, in Savannah, Georgia. Equiano's later conversion to Methodism will become a dominant theme of his life story.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An island in the Netherlands Antilles (West Indies).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Intact.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The year before, a drunken enslaver and his servant had beaten Equiano so brutally that he nearly died.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Release from slavery.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The port near London where Equiano's English enslaver took payment for him from another enslaver.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Acts, chap. xii, ver. 9 [*Equiano's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: 2 Kings 2:11.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The equivalent of £40 in British money.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Book or register D.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Even while enslaved, Equiano had made side deals to obtain money, and here he looks ahead to making extra money

from such dealing.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Michael Pascal, a British enslaver who formerly held Equiano, brought him to England and treated him with apparent kindness, seeming to indicate that he would free him; but after several years in England, during which time Equiano became baptized and gained an education, Pascal abruptly transferred him to another enslaver for payment, who brought Equiano back to England.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Island in the northern Leeward Islands in the Caribbean.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Whipped. "Embarrassed": perplexed, put in a problematic position.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Yamacraw, a bluff and settlement then outside the city of Savannah, Georgia.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Reference as to my character.[Return to reference 2](#)

## ***From Chapter XII***

### **[LETTER TO THE QUEEN]**

March the 21st, 1788, I had the honor of presenting the Queen with a petition on behalf of my African brethren, which was received most graciously by her Majesty:<sup>3</sup>

*To the QUEEN's most Excellent Majesty*  
Madam,

Your Majesty's well-known benevolence and humanity emboldens me to approach your royal presence, trusting that the obscurity of my situation will not prevent your Majesty from attending to the sufferings for which I plead.

Yet I do not solicit your royal pity for my own distress; my sufferings, although numerous, are in a measure forgotten. I supplicate your Majesty's compassion for millions of my African countrymen, who groan under the lash of tyranny in the West Indies.

The oppression and cruelty exercised to the unhappy negroes there, have at length reached the British legislature, and they are now deliberating on its redress;<sup>4</sup> even several persons of property in slaves in the West Indies have petitioned parliament against its continuance, sensible that it is as impolitic as it is unjust—and what is inhuman must ever be unwise.

Your Majesty's reign has been hitherto distinguished by private acts of benevolence and bounty; surely the more extended the misery is, the greater claim it has to your Majesty's compassion, and the greater must be your Majesty's pleasure in administering to its relief. I presume, therefore, gracious Queen, to implore your interposition with your royal consort, in favor of the wretched Africans; that, by your Majesty's benevolent influence, a period<sup>5</sup> may now be put to their misery; and that they may be raised from the condition of brutes, to which they are at present degraded, to the rights and situation of freemen, and admitted to partake of the

blessings of your Majesty's happy government; so shall your Majesty enjoy the heartfelt pleasure of procuring happiness to millions, and be rewarded in the grateful prayers of themselves, and of their posterity.

And may the all-bountiful Creator shower on your Majesty, and the royal family, every blessing that this world can afford, and every fulness of joy which divine revelation has promised us in the next.

I am your Majesty's most dutiful and devoted servant to command,

Gustavus Vassa,

The Oppressed Ethiopian.<sup>6</sup>

No. 53, Baldwin's Gardens.

## Endnotes

1789

- Note 3: At the request of some of my most particular friends, I take the liberty of inserting it here [*Equiano's note*]. "The Queen": Charlotte (1744–1818), consort to George III, supported the abolitionist cause, and was rumored to be biracial. At this point in his life, Equiano is living in London and a major figure in the abolitionist movement.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Discussion of the first, unsuccessful bill to end Britain's trade in enslaved Africans began in 1788.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: End.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Though Equiano is from the kingdom of Benin, "Ethiopian" was commonly used as a general term for an African.[Return to reference 6](#)

# APPENDICES

# **Volume A: The Middle Ages**

# General Bibliography

This bibliography consists of a list of suggested general readings on English literature. Bibliographies for the authors and topical clusters in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* are available online at the NAEL student site.

## Histories of England and of English Literature

Even the most distinguished of the comprehensive general histories written in past generations have come to seem outmoded. Innovative research in social, cultural, and political history has made it difficult to write a single coherent account of England from the Middle Ages to the present, let alone to accommodate in a unified narrative the complex histories of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the other nations where writing in English has flourished. Readers who wish to explore the historical matrix out of which the works of literature collected in this anthology emerged are advised to consult the studies of particular periods listed in the appropriate sections of this bibliography. The multivolume *Oxford History of England* (1934–65) and *New Oxford History of England* (1992–2009) are useful, as are the three-volume *Peoples of the British Isles: A New History*, by Stanford E. Lehmberg, Samantha A. Meigs, and Thomas William Heyck (3rd ed., 1992); the nine-volume *Cambridge Cultural History of Britain*, ed. Boris Ford (1992); the three-volume *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950*, ed. F. M. L. Thompson (1990); and the multivolume *Penguin History of Britain*, gen. ed. David Cannadine (1996–). For Britain's imperial history, readers can consult the five-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (1998–99), as well as *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (2004). Also of interest is Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four*

*Continents* (2015). Given the cultural centrality of London, readers may find particular interest in *The London Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ben Weinreb et al. (3rd ed., 2008); Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (1994); and Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: "A Human Awful Wonder of God"* (2007) and *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (2001).

Similar observations may be made about literary history. In the light of such initiatives as women's studies, New Historicism, and postcolonialism, the range of authors deemed significant has expanded, along with the geographical and conceptual boundaries of literature in English. Attempts to capture in a unified account the great sweep of literature from *Beowulf* to the early twenty-first century have largely given way to studies of individual genres, carefully delimited time periods, and specific authors. Among the large-scale literary surveys, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. Dominic Head (3rd ed., 2006), is useful, as is the nine-volume *Penguin History of Literature* (1987–94) and the multivolume *Oxford History of Poetry in English* (2022–). *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Virginia Blain, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements (1990), is an important resource, and the editorial materials in the two-volume *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (3rd ed., 2007), constitute a concise history and set of biographies of women authors since the Middle Ages. *Annals of English Literature, 1475–1950* (2nd ed., 1961), lists important publications year by year, together with the significant literary events for each year. Seven volumes have been published in *The Oxford English Literary History*, gen. eds. Jonathan Bate and Colin Burrow (2002–): Laura Ashe, *1000–1350: Conquest and Transformation*; James Simpson, *1350–1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution*; Margaret J. M. Ezell, *1645–1714: The Later Seventeenth Century*; Philip Davis, *1830–1880: The Victorians*; Chris Baldick, *1830–1880: The Modern Movement (1910–1940)*; Randall Stevenson, *1960–2000: The Last of England?*; and Bruce King, *1948–2000: The Internationalization of English*.



*Literature*. See also *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (1999); *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare E. Lees (2013); *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (2002); *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, ed. John Richetti (2005); *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (2009); *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (2012); and *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (2004).

Helpful treatments and surveys of English meter, rhyme, and stanza forms are Paul Fussell Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (rev. ed., 1979); Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme: Device and Modernity* (1980); Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (1980); Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (1995); Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide* (1998); *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, ed. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland (2000); John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (3rd ed., 2001); *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, ed. Helen Vendler (3rd ed., 2010); *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (2014); and Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (2015).

On the development and functioning of the novel as a form, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1970; trans. 1980); *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (2000); *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (2 vols.; 2001–03, trans. 2006); McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (15th anniversary ed., 2002); *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (2012); *A Companion to the English Novel*, ed. Stephen Arata et al. (2015); and the ten volumes to date of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2012–). On women novelists and readers, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of*

*the Novel* (1987), and Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (1994).

On the history of playhouse design, see Richard Leacroft, *The Development of the English Playhouse: An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building in England from Medieval to Modern Times* (1988). For a survey of the plays that have appeared on these and other stages, see Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama*, rev. J. C. Trewin (6th ed., 1978); the eight-volume *The Revels History of Drama in English*, gen. eds. Clifford Leech and T. W. Craik (1975–83); Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum and Sylvia Wagonheim (3rd ed., 1989); and the three volumes of *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Jane Milling, Peter Thomson, Joseph Donohue, and Baz Kershaw (2004).

On some of the key intellectual currents that are at once reflected in and shaped by literature and contemporary literary criticism, Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic studies *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) and *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948) remain valuable, along with such works as Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900; trans. 1907; 3rd enl. ed., 2004); Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (4 vols., 1923–95; trans. 1953–96); Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (2 vols., 1939; trans. 1979–82); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (2 vols., 1949; trans. 1953, new trans. 2009); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; trans. 1957, new trans. 2008); Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957; new eds. 1997, 2016); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; 2nd ed., 1998); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958; trans. 1969, new ed. 1994); Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (1960; rev. ed., 1964; rev. and expanded as *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, 2003); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966; trans. 1983); M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*

(1971); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964; trans. 1965) and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; trans. 1970); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967; trans. 1976, 40th anniversary ed. 2016) and *Dissemination* (1972; trans. 1981); Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (1973); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973); Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973; trans. 1975); Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976; new ed., 2015); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979; trans. 1984); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979; 39th anniversary ed., 2009); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980; trans. 1987); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2 vols., 1980; trans. 1984–98); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1985; trans. 1987); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997); Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. Neil Hertz (1997); and N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999).

## Reference Works

The single most important tool for the study of literature in English is the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1884–1924; 2nd ed., 1989; 3rd ed. in process). The most current edition, updated quarterly, is available online to subscribers. The *OED* is written on historical principles: that is, it attempts not only to describe current word use but also to record the history and development of the language from its origins before the Norman Conquest to the present. It thus provides, for familiar as well as archaic and obscure words, the widest possible

range of meanings and uses, organized chronologically and illustrated with quotations. The *OED* can be searched as a conventional dictionary arranged a–z and also by subject, usage, region, origin, and timeline (the first appearance of a word). Resources available for early forms of English include the online Old English and Middle English dictionaries at Lexilogos ([https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english\\_old.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_old.htm) and [https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english\\_middle.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_middle.htm)); also valuable are the *Dictionary of Old English* (1986–) and the *Middle English Dictionary* (1952; digitized 2008). Beyond the *OED* there are many other valuable dictionaries, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary* (5th ed., 50th anniversary printing, 2018); *The Oxford Dictionary of Abbreviations* (1992); T. F. Hoad, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1993); Bas Aarts, Sylvia Chalker, and Edmund Weiner, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (2nd ed., 2014); Morton S. Freeman, *A New Dictionary of Eponyms* (1997); *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English* (1999); *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms*, ed. Judith Siefring (2nd ed., 2004); P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (3rd ed., 2014); Tom McArthur, *The Oxford Guide to World English* (2002); and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, ed. Jennifer Speake (4th ed., 2003). Other valuable reference works include *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, ed. David Crystal (3rd ed., 2018); *The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. Tom McArthur (1998); *Fowler's Concise Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, ed. Jeremy Butterfield (3rd ed., 2016); and the numerous guides to specialized vocabularies, slang, regional dialects, and the like.

There is a steady flow of new editions of most major and many minor writers in English, along with the publication of critical appraisals and scholarship. James L. Harner's *Literary Research Guide: An Annotated List of Reference Sources in English Literary Studies* (6th ed., 2014; available online at [www.mlalrg.org/public](http://www.mlalrg.org/public)) offers thorough, evaluative annotations of a wide range of sources. For the historical record of scholarship and critical discussion, *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. George

Watson (5 vols., 1969–77), and the third edition in process, *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. Joanne Shattock (1 vol. to date, 2000–), are useful. The *MLA International Bibliography* (also online) is a key resource for following critical discussion of literatures in English. Ranging from 1926 to the present, it includes journal articles, essays, chapters from collections, books, and dissertations, and covers folklore, linguistics, and film. The *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature* (ABELL), compiled by the Modern Humanities Research Association, lists monographs, periodical articles, critical editions of literary works, book reviews, and collections of essays published anywhere in the world; unpublished doctoral dissertations are covered for the period 1920–99 (available online to subscribers directly and as part of Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>).

For compact biographies of English authors, see the multivolume *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB), ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (2004); since 2004 the DNB has been extended online with updates (now monthly). Handy reference books of authors, works, and various literary terms and allusions include many volumes in the *Cambridge Companion* and *Oxford Companion* series: e.g., *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (2007); *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Dinah Birch (7th ed., 2009); and *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter Struck (2010). *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, editor-in-chief Roland Greene (4th ed., 2012), is available online to subscribers in Oxford Reference. Handbooks that define and illustrate literary concepts and terms include *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. J. A. Cuddon and M. A. R. Habib (5th ed., 2015); William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature* (12th ed., 2011); *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (2nd ed., 1995); and M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (11th ed., 2014). Also useful are Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (2nd ed., 1991); Arthur Quinn, *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase* (1982); the

*Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (1995); and George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (1994).

On Greek and Roman backgrounds, see *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*—vol. 1, *Greek Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and Bernard M. W. Knox (1985), and vol. 2, *Latin Literature*, ed. E. J. Kenney and W. V. Clausen (1982), both available to subscribers online; *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M. C. Howatson (3rd ed., 2011); Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (1987; trans. 1994); *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow (4th ed., 2012); Richard Rutherford, *Classical Literature: A Concise History* (2005); and Mark P. O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology* (11th ed., 2018). The Loeb Classical Library of Greek and Roman texts with facing-page English translations is now available online to subscribers at [www.loebclassics.com](http://www.loebclassics.com).

Digital resources in the humanities continue to grow rapidly. Among the many useful electronic resources for the study of English literature are enormous digital archives, available to subscribers: Early English Books Online (EEBO), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>; Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>; and Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), [www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online](http://www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online). There are also numerous free sites of variable quality. Many of the best of these are period- or author-specific and hence are listed in the period/author bibliographies on the NAEL website. Among the general sites, one of the most useful and wide-ranging is Voice of the Shuttle (<http://vos.ucsb.edu>), which includes links to Bartleby.com and Project Gutenberg.

## **Literary Criticism and Theory**

*The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* comprises nine volumes (1989–2013): *Classical Criticism*, ed. George A. Kennedy; *The Middle*

*Ages*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson; *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton; *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson; *Romanticism*, ed. Marshall Brown; *The Nineteenth Century, c. 1830–1914*, ed. M. A. R. Habib; *Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey; *From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. Raman Selden; and *Twentieth-Century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris. See also M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953); William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957); René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* (8 vols., 1955–92); Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (1980); J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature* (2002); and John Frow, *Character and Person* (2014). Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker have written *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (6th ed., 2017). Other useful resources include *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth, and Imre Szeman (2nd ed., 2005); *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, gen. ed. Vincent B. Leitch (3rd ed., 2018).

Modern approaches to English literature and literary theory were shaped by certain landmark works: William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; 3rd ed., 1953), *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), and *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951; 3rd ed., 1977); T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1932; 3rd ed., 1951) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957); F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936) and *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948); Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946; trans. 1953); Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950); William K. Wimsatt Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; 2nd ed., 1983); and W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and*

*the English Poet* (1970). René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3rd ed., 1963), is a useful introduction to the variety of scholarly and critical approaches to literature up to the time of its publication. Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed., 2011), discusses recurrent issues and debates. On the discipline of criticism, see John Guillory's *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (2022); Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) is a critical assessment of contemporary criticism.

Beginning in the late 1960s, interest in literary theory as a specific field markedly intensified. Certain forms of literary study had already been influenced by the work of the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson and the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky—and, still more, by conceptions that derived or claimed to derive from Marx and Engels—but the full impact of these theories was not felt until what became known as the “theory revolution” of the 1970s and ’80s. For Marxist literary criticism, see Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1920; trans. 1971), *The Historical Novel* (1937; trans. 1962), and *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki, and Others* (trans. 1950); Walter Benjamin's essays from the 1920s and ’30s, represented in *Illuminations* (1955; trans. 1968) and *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1975; trans. 1978); Mikhail Bakhtin's essays from the 1930s represented in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. 1981) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965; trans. 1968); *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1971); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (1977); Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (1979; 2nd ed., 2003); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981); and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983; anniversary ed., 2008) and *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990).



Structural linguistics and anthropology gave rise to a flowering of structuralist literary criticism; convenient introductions include Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (1974), and Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (new ed., 2002). Poststructuralist challenges to this approach are epitomized in such influential works as Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (1967; trans. 1978), and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971; 2nd ed., 1983). Poststructuralism is discussed in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982; 25th anniversary ed., 2007); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991); John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (1991); and *Beyond Structuralism: The Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading*, ed. Wendell V. Harris (1996). A figure who greatly influenced both structuralism and poststructuralism is Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies* (1957; trans. 1972, new trans. 2012) and *S/Z* (1970; trans. 1974). Among other influential contributions to literary theory are the psychoanalytic approach in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973; 2nd ed., 1997), and the reader-response approach in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980). For a retrospect on these decades, see Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (2003).

Influenced by these theoretical currents but not restricted to them, modern feminist literary criticism was fashioned by such works as Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (1975); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (1976; new ed., 1986); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977; expanded ed., 1999); and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Subsequent studies include Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*

(1977; trans. 1985); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987; new ed., 2006); Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (1987); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (3 vols., 1988–94); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; 2nd ed., 1999); and the critical views sampled in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (1985); *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Mary Eagleton (1986; 3rd ed., 2011); and *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (1991; rev. in 2009 as *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*); *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (1994); *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (2006); and *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2007).

Just as feminist critics used poststructuralist and psychoanalytic methods to place literature in conversation with gender theory, a new school emerged placing literature in conversation with critical race theory. Comprehensive introductions include *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (1995); and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Stephen M. Caliendo and Charlton D. McIlwain (2nd ed., 2021). For an important precursor in cultural studies, see Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978; 2nd ed., 2013). Seminal works include Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988; 25th anniversary ed., 2014); Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1991); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (1993; 25th anniversary ed., 2017); Gene Andrew Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature* (2011); Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (2017); and Saidiya V. Hartman,

*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019). Other important works include Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (2008; rpt. 2017); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016); and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018). Helpful anthologies and collections of essays have emerged in recent decades, such as *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris (1997), and also their *Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (2001); *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (1996; updated 2003); *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher and Michael P. Kramer (2003); *A Companion to African American Literature*, ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett (2010); *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (2011); *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*, ed. Suzanne Bost and Frances R. Aparicio (2013); *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (2014); *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (2015); and *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature, 1945–2010*, ed. Deirdre Osborne (2016).

Gay literature and queer studies are represented in collections including *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (1991); *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (1993); *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature: Readings from Western Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Byrne R. S. Fone (1998); *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (2014); and *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd (2015), and by such books as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,

*Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985; 30th anniversary ed., 2015) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990; updated ed., 2008); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (1989); Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (1995); Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (1998); David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (2002); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007); and Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis* (2016).

New Historicism is represented in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1990; new ed., 2007); *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (1993); *The New Historicism Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (1994); and Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (2000). The related social and historical dimension of texts is discussed in Jerome McGann, *Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983), and *Scholarly Editing: A Guide to Research*, ed. D. C. Greetham (1995). Characteristic of New Historicism is an expansion of the field of literary interpretation still further in cultural studies; for a broad sampling of the range of interests, see *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (1992); *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (1995); and *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (3rd ed., 2007).

This expansion of the field is similarly reflected in postcolonial studies: see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (cited above) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; trans. 1963, 60th anniversary ed. 2021); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993); *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (1990); *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2nd ed., 2006); and such influential books

as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989; 2nd ed., 2002); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995; 2nd ed., 2005); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000; new ed., 2008); and Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001; anniversary ed., 2016). Useful collections include *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (2 vols., 2011–12); *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. Ato Quayson (2016); and *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*, ed. Jahan Ramazani (2017).

In the wake of the theory revolution, critics have focused on a wide array of topics, which can be only briefly surveyed here. One current of work, focusing on the history of emotion, is represented in Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2005); *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010); and Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (2015). A somewhat related current, examining the special role of traumatic memory in literature, is exemplified in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (1995), and Dominic LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001; new ed., 2014). Work on the literary implications of cognitive science may be glimpsed in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (2010). Interest in quantitative approaches to literature was sparked by Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2005). For the field of digital humanities, see Moretti, *Distant Reading* (2013); *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, ed. Melissa Terras, Julianne Nyhan, and Edward Vanhoutte (2013); and *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (2016). For ecocriticism, or studies of literature and the environment, see *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996); *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge and

Neil Sammells (1998); Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (2000); Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005); Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011); *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (2014); and *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, ed. Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (2017). Related are the fields of animal studies and posthumanism, whose key works include Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991; trans. 1993); Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (2000); Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003) and *What Is Posthumanism?* (2009); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2006; trans. 2008); Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012); *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely (2012); and *Critical Animal Studies: Thinking the Unthinkable*, ed. John Sorenson (2014). The relationship between literature and law is central to such works as *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader*, ed. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailloux (1988); *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, ed. Peter Brooks and Paul Gewirtz (1996); *Literature and Legal Problem Solving: Law and Literature as Ethical Discourse*, ed. Paul J. Heald (1998); and *New Directions in Law and Literature*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Bernadette Meyler (2017). Ethical questions in literature have been usefully explored by, among others, Geoffrey Galt Harpham in *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (1992) and Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). Finally, some approaches to literature, such as formalism and literary biography, that seemed superseded in the theoretical ferment of the late twentieth century have had a resurgence. A renewed interest in form is evident in Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002); *Reading for Form*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (2006); and Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy,*

*Network* (2015). Interest in the history of the book was spearheaded by D. F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1986), Jerome J. McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991), and Roger Chartier's *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1992; trans. 1994). See also *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (1996); *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (7 vols., 1999–2019); *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (2nd ed., 2006); and *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Leslie Howsam (2015). For studies in new media and digital or electronic literature, see N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008); Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (2016); and Jessica Pressman's *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (2020).

Anthologies representing a range of recent approaches include *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge with Nigel Wood (2nd ed., 2000); *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (4th ed., 1998); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (cited above).

# Literary Terminology\*

Using simple technical terms can sharpen our understanding and streamline our discussion of literary works. Some terms, such as the ones in section A, below, help us address the internal style, structure, form, and kind of works. Other terms, such as those in section B, provide insight into the material forms in which literary works have been produced.

In analyzing what they called “rhetoric,” ancient Greek and Roman writers determined the elements of what we call “style” and “structure.” Most of our literary terms are derived, via medieval and Renaissance intermediaries, from the Greek and Latin sources. In the definitions that follow, the etymology, or root, of the word is given when it helps illuminate the word’s current usage.

Many of the examples are drawn from texts in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.

Words **boldfaced** within definitions are themselves defined in this appendix. Some terms are defined within definitions; such words are *italicized*.

## A. Terms of Style, Structure, Form, and Kind

**accent** (synonym “stress”): a term of **rhythm**. The special force devoted to the voicing of one syllable in a word over others. In the noun “accent,” for example, the accent, or stress, is on the first syllable.

**act**: the major subdivision of a play, usually divided into **scenes**.

**aesthetics** (from Greek, “to feel, apprehend by the senses”): the philosophy of artistic meaning as a distinct mode of apprehending



untranslatable truth, defined as an alternative to rational enquiry, which is purely abstract. Developed in the late eighteenth century by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant especially.

**Alexandrine:** a term of **meter**. In French verse a line of twelve syllables, and, by analogy, in English verse a line of six stresses. See **hexameter**.

**allegory** (Greek "saying otherwise"): saying one thing (the "vehicle" of the allegory) and meaning another (the allegory's "tenor"). Allegories may be momentary aspects of a work, as in **metaphor** ("John is a lion"), or, through extended metaphor, may constitute the basis of narrative, as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: this second meaning is the dominant one. See also **symbol** and **type**. Allegory is one of the most significant **figures of thought**.

**alliteration** (from Latin "litera," alphabetic letter): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of an initial consonant sound or consonant cluster in consecutive or closely positioned words. This pattern is often an inseparable part of the meter in Germanic languages, where the tonic, or accented **syllable**, is usually the first syllable. Thus all Old English poetry and some varieties of Middle English poetry use alliteration as part of their basic metrical practice. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 1: "Once the siege and assault of Troy had ceased" (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)). Otherwise used for local effects; Stevie Smith, "Pretty," lines 4–5: "And in the pretty pool the pike stalks / He stalks his prey . . ." (see vol. F, [p. 589](#)).

**allusion:** Literary allusion is a passing but illuminating reference within a literary text to another, well-known text (often biblical or **classical**). Topical allusions are also, of course, common in certain modes, especially **satire**.

**anagnorisis** (Greek "recognition"): the moment of **protagonist's** recognition in a narrative, which is also often the moment of moral understanding.

**anapest:** a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two unstressed (uu) syllables followed by one stressed (/). Thus, for example, "Illinois."

**anaphora** (Greek "carrying back"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of words or groups of words at the beginning of consecutive sentences, clauses, or phrases. Blake, "London," lines 5–8: "In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban . . ." (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)); Louise Bennett, "Jamaica Oman," lines 17–20: "Some backa man a push, some side-a / Man a hole him han, / Some a lick sense eena him head, / Some a guide him pon him plan!" (see vol. F, p. 724).

**animal fable:** a **genre**. A short narrative of speaking animals, followed by moralizing comment, written in a low style and gathered into a collection. Robert Henryson, "The Cock and the Jasper" (see vol. A, [p. 679](#)).

**antithesis** (Greek "placing against"): a **figure of thought**. The juxtaposition of opposed terms in clauses or sentences that are next to or near each other. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.777–80: "They but now who seemed / In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons / Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room / Throng numberless" (see vol. B, p. 1446).

**apostrophe** (from Greek "turning away"): a **figure of thought**. An address, often to an absent person, a force, or a quality. For example, a poet makes an apostrophe to a Muse when invoking her for inspiration.

**apposition:** a term of **syntax**. The repetition of elements serving an identical grammatical function in one sentence. The effect of this repetition is to arrest the flow of the sentence, but in doing so to add extra semantic nuance to repeated elements. This is an especially important feature of Old English poetic style. See, for example, Caedmon's *Hymn* (vol. A, [p. 31](#)), where the phrases

“heaven-kingdom’s Guardian,” “the Measurer’s might,” “his mind-plans,” and “the work of the Glory-Father” each serve an identical syntactic function as the direct objects of “praise.”

**assonance** (Latin “sounding to”): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical or near identical stressed vowel sounds in words whose final consonants differ, producing half-rhyme. Tennyson, “The Lady of Shalott,” line 100: “His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed” (see vol. E, [p. 210](#)).

**aubade** (originally from Spanish “alba,” dawn): a **genre**. A lover’s dawn song or lyric bewailing the arrival of the day and the necessary separation of the lovers; Donne, “The Sun Rising” (see vol. B, p. 886). Larkin recasts the genre in “Aubade” (see vol. F, p. 795).

**autobiography** (Greek “self-life writing”): a **genre**. A narrative of a life written by the subject; Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)). There are subgenres, such as the spiritual autobiography, narrating the author’s path to conversion and subsequent spiritual trials, as in Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding*.

**ballad stanza**: a **verse form**. Usually a **quatrain** in alternating **iambic tetrameter** and **iambic trimeter** lines, rhyming abcb. See “Sir Patrick Spens” (vol. D, [p. 38](#)); Louise Bennett’s poems (vol. F, pp. 719–24); Eliot, “Sweeney among the Nightingales” (vol. F, [p. 501](#)); Larkin, “This Be The Verse” (vol. F, p. 795).

**ballade**: a **verse form**. A form consisting usually of three stanzas followed by a four-line envoi (French, “send off”). The last line of the first stanza establishes a **refrain**, which is repeated, or subtly varied, as the last line of each stanza. The form was derived from French medieval poetry; English poets, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries especially, used it with varying stanza forms. Chaucer, “The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse” (see vol. A, [p. 575](#)).

**bathos** (Greek “depth”): a **figure of thought**. A sudden and sometimes ridiculous descent of tone; Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* 3.157–58: “Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast, / When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last” (see vol. C, [p. 549](#)).

**beast epic**: a **genre**. A continuous, unmoralized narrative, in prose or verse, relating the victories of the wholly unscrupulous but brilliant strategist Reynard the Fox over all adversaries. Chaucer arouses, only to deflate, expectations of the genre in *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 556](#)).

**biography** (Greek “life-writing”): a **genre**. A life as the subject of an extended narrative.

**blank verse**: a **verse form**. Unrhymed **iambic pentameter** lines. Blank verse has no stanzas, but is broken up into uneven units (verse paragraphs) determined by sense rather than form. First devised in English by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in his translation of two books of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, this very flexible verse type became the standard form for dramatic poetry in the seventeenth century, as in most of Shakespeare’s plays. Milton and Wordsworth, among many others, also used it to create an English equivalent to **classical epic**.

**blazon**: strictly, a heraldic shield; in rhetorical usage, a **topos** whereby the individual elements of a beloved’s face and body are singled out for **hyperbolic** admiration. Spenser, *Epithalamion*, lines 167–84 (see vol. B, [p. 459](#)). For an inversion of the **topos**, see Shakespeare, Sonnet 130 (vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**burlesque** (French and Italian “mocking”): a work that adopts the **conventions** of a genre with the aim less of comically mocking the genre than of satirically mocking the society so represented (see **satire**). Thus Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)) does not mock **classical epic** so much as contemporary mores.

**caesura** (Latin “cut”) (plural “caesurae”): a term of **meter**. A pause or breathing space within a line of verse, generally occurring between syntactic units; Louise Bennett, “Colonization in Reverse,” lines 5–8: “By de hundred, by de tousan, / From country an from town, / By de ship-load, by de plane-load, / Jamaica is Englan boun” (see vol. F, p. 722), where the caesurae occur in lines 5 and 7.

**canon** (Greek “rule”): the group of texts regarded as worthy of special respect or attention by a given institution. Also, the group of texts regarded as definitely having been written by a certain author.

**catastrophe** (Greek “overturning”): the decisive turn in **tragedy** by which the plot is resolved and, usually, the **protagonist** dies.

**catharsis** (Greek “cleansing”): According to Aristotle, the effect of **tragedy** on its audience, through their experience of pity and terror, was a kind of spiritual cleansing, or catharsis.

**character** (Greek “stamp, impression”): a person, personified animal, or other figure represented in a literary work, especially in narrative and drama. The more a character seems to generate the action of a narrative, and the less he or she seems merely to serve a preordained narrative pattern, the “fuller,” or more “rounded,” a character is said to be. A “stock” character, common particularly in many comic genres, will perform a predictable function in different works of a given genre.

**chiasmus** (Greek “crosswise”): a **figure of speech**. The inversion of an already established sequence. This can involve verbal echoes: Pope, “Eloisa to Abelard,” line 104, “The crime was common, common be the pain” (see vol. C, [p. 560](#)); or it can be purely a matter of syntactic inversion: Pope, *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, line 8: “They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide” (see vol. C, [p. 575](#)).

**classical, classicism, classic**: Each term can be widely applied, but in English literary discourse, “classical” primarily describes the

works of either Greek or Roman antiquity. "Classicism" denotes the practice of art forms inspired by classical antiquity, in particular the observance of rhetorical norms of **decorum** and balance, as opposed to following the dictates of untutored inspiration, as in Romanticism. "Classic" denotes an especially famous work within a given **canon**.

**climax** (Greek "ladder"): a moment of great intensity and structural change, especially in drama. Also a **figure of speech** whereby a sequence of verbally linked clauses is made, in which each successive clause is of greater consequence than its predecessor. Bacon, *Of Studies*: "Studies serve for pastimes, for ornaments, and for abilities. Their chief use for pastimes is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in judgement" (see vol. B, pp. 1165–66).

**comedy**: a **genre**. A term primarily applied to drama, and derived from ancient drama, in opposition to **tragedy**. Comedy deals with humorously confusing, sometimes ridiculous situations in which the ending is, nevertheless, happy. A comedy often ends in one or more marriages.

**comic mode**: Many genres (for example, **romance**, **fabliau**, **comedy**) involve a happy ending in which justice is done, the ravages of time are arrested, and that which is lost is found. Such genres participate in a comic mode.

**connotation**: To understand connotation, we need to understand **denotation**. While many words can denote the same concept—that is, have the same basic meaning—those words can evoke different associations, or connotations. Contrast, for example, the clinical-sounding term "depression" and the more colorful, musical, even poetic phrase "the blues."

**consonance** (Latin "sounding with"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of final consonants in words or stressed syllables whose

vowel sounds are different. Herbert, "Easter," line 13: "Consort, both heart and lute . . ." (see vol. B, p. 1181).

**convention:** a repeatedly recurring feature (in either form or content) of works, occurring in combination with other recurring formal features, which constitutes a convention of a particular genre.

**couplet:** a **verse form**. In English verse two consecutive, rhyming lines usually containing the same number of stresses. Chaucer first introduced the **iambic pentameter** couplet into English (*Canterbury Tales*); the form was later used in many types of writing, including drama; imitations and translations of **classical epic** (thus *heroic couplet*); essays; and **satire** (see Dryden and Pope). The *distich* (Greek "two lines") is a couplet usually making complete sense; Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, lines 5–6: "Read it fair queen, though it defective be, / Your excellence can grace both it and me" (see vol. B, p. 923).

**dactyl** (Greek "finger," because of the finger's three joints): a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of one stressed followed by two unstressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Oregon."

**decorum** (Latin "that which is fitting"): a rhetorical principle whereby each formal aspect of a work should be in keeping with its subject matter and/or audience.

**deixis** (Greek "pointing"): relevant to **point of view**. Every work has, implicitly or explicitly, a "here" and a "now" from which it is narrated. Words that refer to or imply this point from which the voice of the work is projected (such as "here," "there," "this," "that," "now," "then") are examples of deixis, or "deictics." This technique is especially important in drama, where it is used to create a sense of the events happening as the spectator witnesses them.

**denotation:** A word has a basic, "prosaic" (factual) meaning prior to the associations it connotes (see **connotation**). The word

“steed,” for example, might call to mind a horse fitted with battle gear, to be ridden by a warrior, but its denotation is simply “horse.”

**denouement** (French “unknotting”): the point at which a narrative can be resolved and so ended.

**dialogue** (Greek “conversation”): a **genre**. Dialogue is a feature of many genres, especially in both the **novel** and drama. As a genre itself, dialogue is used in philosophical traditions especially (most famously in Plato’s *Dialogues*), as the representation of a conversation in which a philosophical question is pursued among various speakers.

**diction**, or “**lexis**” (from, respectively, Latin *dictio* and Greek *lexis*, each meaning “word”): the actual words used in any utterance—speech, writing, and, for our purposes here, literary works. The choice of words contributes significantly to the style of a given work.

**didactic mode** (Greek “teaching mode”): **Genres** in a didactic mode are designed to instruct or teach, sometimes explicitly (for example, sermons, philosophical **discourses**, **georgic**), and sometimes through the medium of fiction (for example, **animal fable**, **parable**).

**diegesis** (Greek for “narration”): a term that simply means “narration,” but is used in literary criticism to distinguish one kind of story from another. In a *mimetic* story, the events are played out before us (see **mimesis**), whereas in diegesis someone recounts the story to us. Drama is for the most part *mimetic*, whereas the novel is for the most part diegetic. In novels the narrator is not, usually, part of the action of the narrative; s/he is therefore extradiegetic.

**dimeter** (Greek “two measure”): a term of **meter**. A two-stress line, rarely used as the meter of whole poems, though used with great frequency in single poems by Skelton, for example, “The Tunning of Elinour Rumming” (see vol. B, [p. 41](#)). Otherwise used for



single lines, as in Herbert, "Discipline," line 3: "O my God" (see vol. B, p. 1195).

**discourse** (Latin "running to and fro"): broadly, any nonfictional speech or writing; as a more specific genre, a philosophical meditation on a set theme.

**dramatic irony**: a feature of narrative and drama, whereby the audience knows that the outcome of an action will be the opposite of that intended by a **character**.

**dramatic monologue** (Greek "single speaking"): a **genre**. A poem in which the voice of a historical or fictional **character** speaks, unmediated by any narrator, to an implied though silent audience. See Tennyson, "Ulysses" (vol. E, [p. 217](#)); Browning, "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" (vol. E, [p. 416](#)); Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (vol. F, [p. 498](#)); Carol Ann Duffy, "Medusa" and "Mrs Lazarus" (vol. F, pp. 1161–63).

**ecphrasis** (Greek "speaking out"): a **topos** whereby a work of visual art is represented in a literary work. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)).

**elegy**: a **genre**. In **classical** literature elegy was a form written in elegiac **couplets** (a **hexameter** followed by a **pentameter**) devoted to many possible topics. In Ovidian elegy a lover meditates on the trials of erotic desire (for example, Ovid's *Amores*). The **sonnet** sequences of both Sidney and Shakespeare exploit this genre, and, while it was still practiced in classical tradition by Donne ("On His Mistress" [see vol. B, p. 901]), by the later seventeenth century the term came to denote the poetry of loss, especially through the death of a loved person. See Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (vol. E, [p. 231](#)); Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F, p. 977).

**emblem** (Greek "an insertion"): a **figure of thought**. A picture allegorically expressing a moral, or a verbal picture open to such

interpretation.

**end-stopping:** the placement of a complete syntactic unit within a complete poetic line, fulfilling the metrical pattern; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," line 42: "Earth, receive an honoured guest" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)). Compare **enjambment**.

**enjambment** (French "striding," encroaching): The opposite of **end-stopping**, enjambment occurs when the syntactic unit does not end with the end of the poetic line and the fulfillment of the metrical pattern. When the sense of the line overflows its meter and, therefore, the line break, we have enjambment; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," lines 44–45: "Let the Irish vessel lie / Emptied of its poetry" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)).

**epic** (synonym, *heroic poetry*): a **genre**. An extended narrative poem celebrating martial heroes, invoking divine inspiration, beginning in medias res (see **order**), written in a high style (including the deployment of **epic similes**; on high style, see **register**), and divided into long narrative sequences. Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* were the prime models for English writers of epic verse. Thus Milton, *Paradise Lost* (see vol. B, p. 1427); Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)); and Walcott, *Omeros* (see vol. F, p. 808). With its precise repertoire of stylistic resources, epic lent itself easily to **parodic** and **burlesque** forms, known as **mock epic**; thus Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)).

**epigram:** a **genre**. A short, pithy poem wittily expressed, often with wounding intent. See Jonson, *Epigrams* (see vol. B, p. 1047).

**epigraph** (Greek "inscription"): a **genre**. Any formal statement inscribed on stone; also the brief formulation on a book's title page, or a quotation at the beginning of a poem, introducing the work's themes in the most compressed form possible.

**epistle** (Latin "letter"): a **genre**. The letter can be shaped as a literary form, involving an intimate address often between equals.

The *Epistles* of Horace provided a model for English writers from the sixteenth century. Thus Wyatt, "Mine Own John Poins" (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)), or Leapor, "An Epistle to a Lady" (vol. C, p. 771). Letters can be shaped to form the matter of an extended fiction, as the eighteenth-century epistolary **novel** (for example, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*).

**epitaph:** a **genre**. A pithy formulation to be inscribed on a funeral monument. Thus Raleigh, "The Author's Epitaph, Made by Himself" (see vol. B, [p. 479](#)).

**epithalamion** (Greek "concerning the bridal chamber"): a **genre**. A wedding poem, celebrating the marriage and wishing the couple good fortune. Thus Spenser, *Epithalamion* (see vol. B, [p. 455](#)).

**epyllion** (plural "epyllia") (Greek: "little epic"): a **genre**. A relatively short poem in the meter of epic poetry. See, for example, Marlowe, *Hero and Leander* (vol. B, [p. 562](#)).

**essay** (French "trial, attempt"): a **genre**. An informal philosophical meditation, usually in prose and sometimes in verse. The journalistic periodical essay was developed in the early eighteenth century. Thus Addison and Steele, periodical essays (see vol. C, [p. 281](#)); Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (see vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

**euphemism** (Greek "sweet saying"): a **figure of thought**. The figure by which something distasteful is described in alternative, less repugnant terms (for example, "he passed away").

**exegesis** (Greek "leading out"): interpretation, traditionally of the biblical text, but, by transference, of any text.

**exemplum** (Latin "example"): an example inserted into a usually nonfictional writing (for example, sermon or **essay**) to give extra force to an abstract thesis.

**fabliau** (French “little story,” plural *fabliaux*): a **genre**. A short, funny, often bawdy narrative in low style (see **register**) imitated and developed from French models, most subtly by Chaucer; see *The Miller’s Prologue and Tale* (vol. A, [p. 494](#)).

**farce** (French “stuffing”): a **genre**. A play designed to provoke laughter through the often humiliating antics of stock **characters**. Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (see vol. C, [p. 221](#)) draws on this tradition.

**figures of speech**: Literary language often employs patterns perceptible to the eye and/or to the ear. Such patterns are called “figures of speech”; in classical rhetoric they were called “schemes” (from Greek *schema*, meaning “form, figure”).

**figures of thought**: Language can also be patterned conceptually, even outside the rules that normally govern it. Literary language in particular exploits this licensed linguistic irregularity. Synonyms for figures of thought are “trope” (Greek “twisting,” referring to the irregularity of use) and “conceit” (Latin “concept,” referring to the fact that these figures are perceptible only to the mind). Be careful not to confuse **trope** with **topos** (a common error).

**first-person narration**: relevant to **point of view**, a narrative in which the voice narrating refers to itself with forms of the first-person pronoun (“I,” “me,” “my,” etc., or possibly “we,” “us,” “our”), and in which the narrative is determined by the limitations of that voice. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*.

**frame narrative**: Some narratives, particularly collections of narratives, involve a frame narrative that explains the genesis of, and/or gives a perspective on, the main narrative or narratives to follow. Thus Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*; or Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

**free indirect style**: relevant to **point of view**, a narratorial voice that manages, without explicit reference, to imply, and often

implicitly to comment on, the voice of a **character** in the narrative itself. Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," where the voice, although strictly that of the adult narrator, manages to convey the child's manner of perception: "—I begin: the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black background—my mother's dress."

**genre and mode:** The **style**, structure, and, often, length of a work, when coupled with a certain subject matter, raise expectations that a literary work conforms to a certain **genre** (French "kind"). Good writers might upset these expectations, but they remain aware of the expectations and thwart them purposefully. Works in different genres may nevertheless participate in the same **mode**, a broader category designating the fundamental perspectives governing various genres of writing. For mode, see **tragic, comic, satiric, and didactic modes**. Genres are fluid, sometimes very fluid (for example, the **novel**); the word "usually" should be added to almost every account of the characteristics of a given genre!

**georgic** (Greek "farming"): a **genre**. Virgil's *Georgics* treat agricultural and occasionally scientific subjects, giving instructions on the proper management of farms. Unlike **pastoral**, which treats the countryside as a place of recreational idleness among shepherds, the georgic treats it as a place of productive labor.

**hermeneutics** (from the Greek god Hermes, messenger between the gods and humankind): the science of interpretation, first formulated as such by the German philosophical theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century.

**heroic poetry:** see **epic**.

**hexameter** (Greek "six measure"): a term of **meter**. The hexameter line (a six-stress line) is the meter of **classical** Latin **epic**; while not imitated in that form for epic verse in English, some instances of the hexameter exist. See, for example, the last line of a

Spenserian stanza, *Faerie Queene* 1.1.2: "O help thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong" (vol. B, [p. 269](#)), or Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," line 1: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree" (vol. F, [p. 221](#)).

**homily** (Greek "discourse"): a **genre**. A sermon, to be preached in church; *Book of Homilies* (see vol. B, [p. 164](#)). Writers of literary fiction sometimes exploit the homily, or sermon, as in Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 540](#)).

**homophone** (Greek "same sound"): a **figure of speech**. A word that sounds identical to another word but has a different meaning ("bear" / "bare").

**hyperbaton** (Greek "overstepping"): a term of **syntax**. The rearrangement, or inversion, of the expected word order in a sentence or clause. Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," line 38: "If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise" (vol. C, p. 899). Poets can suspend the expected syntax over many lines, as in the first sentences of the *Canterbury Tales* (vol. A, [p. 474](#)) and of *Paradise Lost* (vol. B, p. 1428).

**hyperbole** (Greek "throwing over"): a **figure of thought**. Overstatement, exaggeration; Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," lines 11–12: "My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires, and more slow" (see vol. B, p. 1271); Auden, "As I Walked Out One Evening," lines 9–12: "I'll love you, dear, I'll love you / Till China and Africa meet / And the river jumps over the mountain / And the salmon sing in the street" (see vol. F, [p. 675](#)).

**hypermetrical** (adj.; Greek "over measured"): a term of **meter**; the word describes a breaking of the expected metrical pattern by at least one extra syllable.

**hypotaxis**, or **subordination** (respectively Greek and Latin "ordering under"): a term of **syntax**. The subordination, by the use of subordinate clauses, of different elements of a sentence to a

single main verb. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9.513–15: “As when a ship by skillful steersman wrought / Nigh river’s mouth or foreland, where the wind / Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail; So varied he” (vol. B, p. 1586). The contrary principle to **parataxis**.

**iamb**: a term of **rhythm**. The basic foot of English verse; two syllables following the rhythmic pattern of unstressed followed by stressed and producing a rising effect. Thus, for example, “Vermont.”

**imitation**: the practice whereby writers strive ideally to reproduce and yet renew the **conventions** of an older form, often derived from **classical** civilization. Such a practice will be praised in periods of classicism (for example, the eighteenth century) and repudiated in periods dominated by a model of inspiration (for example, Romanticism).

**irony** (Greek “dissimulation”): a **figure of thought**. In broad usage, irony designates the result of inconsistency between a statement and a context that undermines the statement. “It’s a beautiful day” is unironic if it’s a beautiful day; if, however, the weather is terrible, then the inconsistency between statement and context is ironic. The effect is often amusing; the need to be ironic is sometimes produced by censorship of one kind or another. Strictly, irony is a subset of allegory: whereas allegory says one thing and means another, irony says one thing and means its opposite. For an extended example of irony, see Swift’s “Modest Proposal” (vol. C, [p. 511](#)). See also **dramatic irony**.

**journal** (French “daily”): a **genre**. A diary, or daily record of ephemeral experience, whose perspectives are concentrated on, and limited by, the experiences of single days. Thus Pepys, *Diary* (see vol. C, [p. 74](#)).

**lai**: a **genre**. A short narrative, often characterized by images of great intensity; a French term, and a form practiced by Marie de France (see vol. A, [p. 159](#)).



**legend** (Latin “requiring to be read”): a **genre**. A narrative of a celebrated, possibly historical, but mortal **protagonist**. To be distinguished from **myth**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

**lexical set**: Words that habitually recur together (for example, January, February, March, etc.; or red, white, and blue) form a lexical set.

**litotes** (from Greek “smooth”): a **figure of thought**. Strictly, understatement by denying the contrary; More, *Utopia*: “differences of no slight import” (see vol. B, [p. 49](#)). More loosely, understatement; Stevie Smith, “Sunt Leones,” lines 11–12: “And if the Christians felt a little blue— / Well people being eaten often do” (see vol. F, [p. 585](#)).

**lullaby**: a **genre**. A bedtime, sleep-inducing song for children, in simple and regular meter. Adapted by Auden, “Lullaby” (see vol. F, [p. 671](#)).

**lyric** (from Greek “lyre”): Initially meaning a song, “lyric” refers to a short poetic form, without restriction of meter, in which the expression of personal emotion, often by a voice in the first person, is given primacy over narrative sequence. Thus “The Wife’s Lament” (see vol. A, [p. 126](#)); Yeats, “The Wild Swans at Coole” (see vol. F, [p. 229](#)).

**masque**: a **genre**. Costly entertainments of the Stuart court, involving dance, song, speech, and elaborate stage effects, in which courtiers themselves participated.

**metaphor** (Greek “carrying across,” etymologically parallel to Latin “translation”): One of the most significant **figures of thought**, metaphor designates identification or implicit identification of one thing with another with which it is not literally identifiable. Blake, “London,” lines 11–12: “And the hapless Soldier’s sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls” (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)).



**meter:** Verse (from Latin *versus*, turned) is distinguished from prose (from Latin *prorsus*, "straightforward") as a more compressed form of expression, shaped by metrical norms. **Meter** (Greek "measure") refers to the regularly recurring sound pattern of verse lines. The means of producing sound patterns across lines differ in different poetic traditions. Verse may be **quantitative**, or determined by the quantities of syllables (set patterns of long and short syllables), as in Latin and Greek poetry. It may be **syllabic**, determined by fixed numbers of syllables in the line, as in the verse of Romance languages (for example, French and Italian). It may be **accentual**, determined by the number of accents, or stresses in the line, with variable numbers of syllables, as in Old English and some varieties of Middle English alliterative verse. Or it may be **accentual-syllabic**, determined by the numbers of accents, but possessing a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, so as to produce regular numbers of syllables per line. Since Chaucer, English verse has worked primarily within the many possibilities of accentual-syllabic meter. The unit of meter is the **foot**. In English verse the number of feet per line corresponds to the number of accents in a line. For the types and examples of different meters, see **monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, and hexameter**. In the definitions below, "u" designates one unstressed syllable, and "/" one stressed syllable.

**metonymy** (Greek "change of name"): one of the most significant **figures of thought**. Using a word to **denote** another concept or other concepts, by virtue of habitual association. Thus "The Press," designating printed news media. Fictional names often work by associations of this kind. Closely related to **synecdoche**.

**mimesis** (Greek for "imitation"): A central function of literature and drama has been to provide a plausible imitation of the reality of the world beyond the literary work; mimesis is the representation and imitation of what is taken to be reality.

***mise-en-abyme*** (French for “cast into the abyss”): Some works of art represent themselves in themselves; if they do so effectively, the represented artifact also represents itself, and so ad infinitum. The effect achieved is called “*mise-en-abyme*.” Hoccleve’s *Complaint*, for example, represents a depressed man reading about a depressed man. This sequence threatens to become a *mise-en-abyme*.

**monometer** (Greek “one measure”): a term of **meter**. An entire line with just one stress; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 15, “most (u) grand (/)” (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)).

**myth**: a **genre**. The narrative of **protagonists** with, or subject to, superhuman powers. A myth expresses some profound foundational truth, often by accounting for the origin of natural phenomena. To be distinguished from **legend**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

**novel**: an extremely flexible **genre** in both form and subject matter. Usually in prose, giving high priority to narration of events, with a certain expectation of length, novels are preponderantly rooted in a specific, and often complex, social world; sensitive to the realities of material life; and often focused on one **character** or a small circle of central characters. By contrast with chivalric **romance** (the main European narrative genre prior to the novel), novels tend to eschew the marvelous in favor of a recognizable social world and credible action. The novel’s openness allows it to participate in all modes, and to be co-opted for a huge variety of subgenres. In English literature the novel dates from the late seventeenth century and has been astonishingly successful in appealing to a huge readership, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The English and Irish tradition of the novel includes, for example, Fielding, Austen, the Brontë sisters, Dickens, George Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, Lawrence, and Joyce, to name but a few very great exponents of the genre.

**novella:** a **genre**. A short **novel**, often characterized by imagistic intensity. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (see vol. F, [p. 70](#)).

**occupatio** (Latin “taking possession”): a **figure of thought**. Denying that one will discuss a subject while actually discussing it; also known as “praeteritio” (Latin “passing by”). See Chaucer, *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, lines 414–31 (see vol. A, [p. 565](#)).

**ode** (Greek “song”): a **genre**. A **lyric** poem in elevated, or high style (see **register**), often addressed to a natural force, a person, or an abstract quality. The Pindaric ode in English is made up of **stanzas** of unequal length, while the Horatian ode has stanzas of equal length. For examples of both types, see, respectively, Wordsworth, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (vol. D, [p. 381](#)); and Marvell, “An Horatian Ode” (vol. B, p. 1280), or Keats, “Ode on Melancholy” (vol. D, p. 973). For a fuller discussion, see the headnote to Jonson’s “Ode on Cary and Morison” (vol. B, p. 1057).

**omniscient narrator** (Latin “all-knowing narrator”): relevant to **point of view**. A narrator who, in the fiction of the narrative, has complete access to both the deeds and the thoughts of all **characters** in the narrative. Thus Thomas Hardy, “On the Western Circuit” (see vol. F, [p. 36](#)).

**onomatopoeia** (Greek “name making”): a **figure of speech**. Verbal sounds that imitate and evoke the sounds they denote. Hopkins, “Binsey Poplars,” lines 10–12 (about some felled trees): “O if we but knew what we do / When we delve [dig] or hew— / Hack and rack the growing green!” (see vol. E, p. 726).

**order:** A story may be told in different narrative orders. A narrator might use the sequence of events as they happened, and thereby follow what **classical** rhetoricians called the *natural order*; alternatively, the narrator might reorder the sequence of events, beginning the narration either in the middle or at the end of the sequence of events, thereby following an *artificial order*. If a narrator

begins in the middle of events, he or she is said to begin *in medias res* (Latin "in the middle of the matter"). For a brief discussion of these concepts, see Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, "A Letter of the Authors" (vol. B, [p. 265](#)). Modern narratology makes a related distinction, between *histoire* (French "story") for the natural order that readers mentally reconstruct, and *discours* (French, here "narration") for the narrative as presented. See also **plot** and **story**.

**ottava rima: a verse form.** An eight-line stanza form, rhyming abababcc, using **iambic pentameter**; Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium" (see vol. F, [p. 234](#)). Derived from the Italian poet Boccaccio, an eight-line stanza was used by fifteenth-century English poets for inset passages (for example, Christ's speech from the Cross in Lydgate's *Testament*, lines 754–897). The form in this rhyme scheme was used in English poetry for long narrative by, for example, Byron (*Don Juan*; see vol. D, p. 690).

**oxymoron** (Greek "sharp blunt"): a **figure of thought**. The conjunction of normally incompatible terms; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.63: "darkness visible" (see vol. B, p. 1429).

**panegyric: a genre.** Demonstrative, or epideictic (Greek "showing"), rhetoric was a branch of **classical** rhetoric. Its own two main branches were the rhetoric of praise on the one hand and of vituperation on the other. Panegyric, or eulogy (Greek "sweet speaking"), or encomium (plural *encomia*), is the term used to describe the speeches or writings of praise.

**parable: a genre.** A simple story designed to provoke, and often accompanied by, **allegorical** interpretation, most famously by Christ as reported in the Gospels.

**paradox** (Greek "contrary to received opinion"): a **figure of thought**. An apparent contradiction that requires thought to reveal an inner consistency. Chaucer, "Troilus's Song," line 12: "O sweete harm so quainte" (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

**parataxis**, or **coordination** (respectively Greek and Latin “ordering beside”): a term of **syntax**. The coordination, by the use of coordinating conjunctions, of different main clauses in a single sentence. Malory, *Morte Darthur*: “So Sir Lancelot departed and took his sword under his arm, and so he walked in his mantel, that noble knight, and put himself in great jeopardy” (see vol. A, [p. 607](#)). The opposite principle to **hypotaxis**.

**parody**: a work that uses the **conventions** of a particular genre with the aim of comically mocking a **topos**, a genre, or a particular exponent of a genre. Shakespeare parodies the topos of **blazon** in Sonnet 130 (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**pastoral** (from Latin *pastor*, “shepherd”): a **genre**. Pastoral is set among shepherds, making often refined **allusion** to other apparently unconnected subjects (sometimes politics) from the potentially idyllic world of highly literary if illiterate shepherds. Pastoral is distinguished from **georgic** by representing recreational rural idleness, whereas the georgic offers instruction on how to manage rural labor. English writers had classical models in the *Idylls* of Theocritus in Greek and Virgil’s *Eclogues* in Latin. Pastoral is also called bucolic (from the Greek word for “herdsman”). Thus Spenser, *Shepheardes Calender* (see vol. B, [p. 257](#)).

**pathetic fallacy**: the attribution of sentiment to natural phenomena, as if they were in sympathy with human feelings. Thus Milton, *Lycidas*, lines 146–47: “With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head, / And every flower that sad embroidery wears” (see vol. B, p. 1404). For critique of the practice, see Ruskin (who coined the term), “Of the Pathetic Fallacy” (vol. E, [p. 467](#)).

**pentameter** (Greek “five measure”): a term of **meter**. In English verse, a five-stress line. Between the late fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, this meter, frequently employing an iambic rhythm, was the basic line of English verse. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth each, for example, deployed this very

flexible line as their primary resource; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.128: "O Prince, O Chief of many thronèd Powers" (see vol. B, p. 1431).

**performative:** Verbal expressions have many different functions. They can, for example, be descriptive, or constative (if they make an argument), or performative, for example. A performative utterance is one that makes something happen in the world by virtue of its utterance. "I hereby sentence you to ten years in prison," if uttered in the appropriate circumstances, itself performs an action; it makes something happen in the world. By virtue of its performing an action, it is called a "performative." See also **speech act**.

**peripeteia** (Greek "turning about"): the sudden reversal of fortune (in both directions) in a dramatic work.

**periphrasis** (Greek "declaring around"): a **figure of thought**. Circumlocution; the use of many words to express what could be expressed in few or one; Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 39.1–4.

**persona** (Latin "sound through"): originally the mask worn in the Roman theater to magnify an actor's voice; in literary discourse *persona* (plural *personae*) refers to the narrator or speaker of a text, whose voice is coherent and whose person need have no relation to the person of the actual author of a text. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (see vol. F, [p. 498](#)).

**personification**, or **prosopopoeia** (Greek "person making"): a **figure of thought**. The attribution of human qualities to nonhuman forces or objects; Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," lines 1–2: "Thou still unvanish'd bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time" (see vol. D, p. 971).

**plot:** the sequence of events in a story as narrated, as distinct from **story**, which refers to the sequence of events as we reconstruct them from the plot. See also **order**.

**point of view:** All of the many kinds of writing involve a point of view from which a text is, or seems to be, generated. The presence of such a point of view may be powerful and explicit, as in many novels, or deliberately invisible, as in much drama. In some genres, such as the **novel**, the narrator does not necessarily tell the story from a position we can predict; that is, the needs of a particular story, not the **conventions** of the genre, determine the narrator's position. In other genres, the narrator's position is fixed by convention; in certain kinds of love poetry, for example, the narrating voice is always that of a suffering lover. Not only does the point of view significantly inform the style of a work, but it also informs the structure of that work.

**protagonist** (Greek "first actor"): the hero or heroine of a drama or narrative.

**pun:** a **figure of thought**. A sometimes irresolvable doubleness of meaning in a single word or expression; Shakespeare, Sonnet 135, line 1: "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*" (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**quatrain:** a **verse form**. A stanza of four lines, usually rhyming abcb, abab, or abba. Of many possible examples, see Crashaw, "On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord" (see vol. B, p. 1212).

**refrain:** usually a single line repeated as the last line of consecutive stanzas, sometimes with subtly different wording and ideally with subtly different meaning as the poem progresses.

**register:** The register of a word is its stylistic level, which can be distinguished by degree of technicality but also by degree of formality. We choose our words from different registers according to context, that is, audience and/or environment. Thus a chemist in a laboratory will say "sodium chloride," a cook in a kitchen "salt." A formal register designates the kind of language used in polite society (for example, "Mr. President"), while an informal or colloquial



register is used in less formal or more relaxed social situations (for example, “the boss”). In **classical** and medieval rhetoric, these registers of formality were called *high style* and *low style*. A *middle style* was defined as the style fit for narrative, not drawing attention to itself.

**rhetoric:** the art of verbal persuasion. **Classical** rhetoricians distinguished three areas of rhetoric: the forensic, to be used in law courts; the deliberative, to be used in political or philosophical deliberations; and the demonstrative, or epideictic, to be used for the purposes of public praise or blame. Rhetorical manuals covered all the skills required of a speaker, from the management of style and structure to delivery. These manuals powerfully influenced the theory of poetics as a separate branch of verbal practice, particularly in the matter of style.

**rhyme:** a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical vowel sounds in stressed syllables whose initial consonants differ (“dead” / “head”). In poetry, rhyme often links the end of one line with another. *Masculine rhyme*: full rhyme on the final syllable of the line (“decays” / “days”). *Feminine rhyme*: full rhyme on syllables that are followed by unaccented syllables (“fountains” / “mountains”). *Internal rhyme*: full rhyme within a single line; Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, line 7: “The guests are met, the feast is set” (see vol. D, [p. 475](#)). *Rhyme riche*: rhyming on **homophones**; Chaucer, *General Prologue*, lines 17–18: “seeke” / “seke.” *Off rhyme* (also known as *half rhyme*, *near rhyme*, or *slant rhyme*): differs from perfect rhyme in changing the vowel sound and/or the concluding consonants expected of perfect rhyme; Byron, “They say that Hope is Happiness,” lines 5–7: “most” / “lost.” *Pararhyme*: stressed vowel sounds differ but are flanked by identical or similar consonants; Owen, “Miners,” lines 9–11: “simmer” / “summer” (see vol. F, [p. 169](#)).

**rhyme royal:** a **verse form**. A **stanza** of seven **iambic pentameter** lines, rhyming ababbcc; first introduced by Chaucer



and called “royal” because the form was used by James I of Scotland for his *Kingis Quair* in the early fifteenth century. Chaucer, “Troilus’s Song” (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

**rhythm:** Rhythm is not absolutely distinguishable from **meter**. One way of making a clear distinction between these terms is to say that rhythm (from the Greek “to flow”) denotes the patterns of sound within the feet of verse lines and the combination of those feet. Very often a particular meter will raise expectations that a given rhythm will be used regularly through a whole line or a whole poem. Thus in English verse the pentameter regularly uses an iambic rhythm. Rhythm, however, is much more fluid than meter, and many lines within the same poem using a single meter will frequently exploit different rhythmic possibilities. For examples of different rhythms, see **iamb**, **trochee**, **anapest**, **spondee**, and **dactyl**.

**romance:** a **genre**. From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the main form of European narrative, in either verse or prose, was that of chivalric romance. Romance, like the later **novel**, is a very fluid genre, but romances are often characterized by (i) a tripartite structure of social integration, followed by disintegration, involving moral tests and often marvelous events, itself the prelude to reintegration in a happy ending, frequently of marriage; and (ii) aristocratic social milieux. Thus *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)); Spenser’s (unfinished) *Faerie Queene* (vol. B, [p. 263](#)). The immensely popular, fertile genre was absorbed, in both domesticated and undomesticated form, by the novel. For an adaptation of romance, see Chaucer, *Wife of Bath’s Tale* (vol. A, [p. 512](#)).

**sarcasm** (Greek “flesh tearing”): a **figure of thought**. A wounding expression, often expressed ironically; Boswell, *Life of Johnson*: Johnson [asked if any man of the modern age could have written the **epic** poem *Fingal*] replied, “Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children” (see vol. C, p. 891).

**satire** (Latin for “a bowl of mixed fruits”): a **genre**. In Roman literature (for example, Juvenal), the communication, in the form of a letter between equals, complaining of the ills of contemporary society. The genre in this form is characterized by a first-person narrator exasperated by social ills; the letter form; a high frequency of contemporary reference; and the use of invective in **low-style** language. Pope practices the genre thus in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (see vol. C, [p. 573](#)). Wyatt’s “Mine Own John Poins” (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)) draws ultimately on a gentler, Horatian model of the genre.

**satiric mode:** Works in a very large variety of genres are devoted to the more or less savage attack on social ills. Thus Swift’s travel narrative *Gulliver’s Travels* (see vol. C, [p. 377](#)), his **essay** “A Modest Proposal” (vol. C, [p. 511](#)), and Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* (vol. C, [p. 587](#)), to look no further than the eighteenth century, are all within a satiric mode.

**scene:** a subdivision of an **act**, itself a subdivision of a dramatic performance and/or text. The action of a scene usually occurs in one place.

**sensibility** (from Latin, “capable of being perceived by the senses”): as a literary term, an eighteenth-century concept derived from moral philosophy that stressed the social importance of fellow feeling and particularly of sympathy in social relations. The concept generated a literature of “sensibility,” such as the sentimental **novel** (the most famous of which was Goethe’s *Sorrows of the Young Werther* [1774]), or sentimental poetry, such as Cowper’s passage on the stricken deer in *The Task* (see vol. C, p. 1076).

**short story:** a **genre**. Generically similar to, though shorter and more concentrated than, the **novel**; often published as part of a collection. Thus Mansfield, “The Daughters of the Late Colonel” (see vol. F, [p. 542](#)).

**simile** (Latin “like”): a **figure of thought**. Comparison, usually using the word “like” or “as,” of one thing with another so as to produce sometimes surprising analogies. Donne, “The Storm,” lines 29–30: “Sooner than you read this line did the gale, / Like shot, not feared till felt, our sails assail.” Frequently used, in extended form, in **epic** poetry; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.338–46 (see vol. B, p. 1436).

**soliloquy** (Latin “single speaking”): a **topos** of drama, in which a **character**, alone or thinking to be alone on stage, speaks so as to give the audience access to his or her private thoughts.

**sonnet**: a **verse form**. A form combining a variable number of units of rhymed lines to produce a fourteen-line poem, usually in rhyming **iambic pentameter** lines. In English there are two principal varieties: the Petrarchan sonnet, formed by an octave (an eight-line stanza, often broken into two **quatrains** having the same rhyme scheme, typically abba abba) and a sestet (a six-line stanza, typically cdecde or cdcdcd); and the Shakespearean sonnet, formed by three quatrains (abab cdcd efef) and a **couplet** (gg). The declaration of a sonnet can take a sharp turn, or “volta,” often at the decisive formal shift from octave to sestet in the Petrarchan sonnet, or in the final couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet, introducing a trenchant counterstatement. Derived from Italian poetry, and especially from the poetry of Petrarch, the sonnet was first introduced to English poetry by Wyatt, and initially used principally for the expression of unrequited erotic love, though later poets used the form for many other purposes. See Wyatt, “Whoso List to Hunt” (vol. B, [p. 123](#)); Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (vol. B, [p. 541](#)); Shakespeare, *Sonnets* (vol. B, [p. 624](#)); Wordsworth, “London, 1802” (vol. D, [p. 390](#)); McKay, “If We Must Die” (vol. F, [p. 576](#)); Heaney, “Clearances” (vol. F, p. 977).

**speech act**: Words and deeds are often distinguished, but words are often (perhaps always) themselves deeds. Utterances can perform different speech acts, such as promising, declaring, casting

a spell, encouraging, persuading, denying, lying, and so on. See also **performative**.

**Spenserian stanza:** a **verse form**. The stanza developed by Spenser for *The Faerie Queene*; nine **iambic** lines, the first eight of which are **pentameters**, followed by one **hexameter**, rhyming ababbcbcc. See also, for example, Shelley, *Adonais* (vol. D, p. 851), and Keats, *The Eve of St. Agnes* (vol. D, p. 953).

**spondee:** a term of **meter**. A two-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two stressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Utah."

**stanza** (Italian "room"): groupings of two or more lines, though "stanza" is usually reserved for groupings of at least four lines. Stanzas are often joined by rhyme, often in sequence, where each group shares the same metrical pattern and, when rhymed, rhyme scheme. Stanzas can themselves be arranged into larger groupings. Poets often invent new **verse forms**, or they may work within established forms.

**story:** a narrative's sequence of events, which we reconstruct from those events as they have been recounted by the narrator (i.e., the **plot**). See also **order**.

**stream of consciousness:** usually a **first-person** narrative that seems to give the reader access to the narrator's mind as it perceives or reflects on events, prior to organizing those perceptions into a coherent narrative. Thus (though generated from a **third-person** narrative) Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Penelope" (see vol. F, [p. 452](#)).

**style** (from Latin for "writing instrument"): In literary works the manner in which something is expressed contributes substantially to its meaning. The expressions "sun," "mass of helium at the center of the solar system," "heaven's golden orb" all designate "sun," but do so in different manners, or styles, which produce different meanings. The manner of a literary work is its "style," the effect of which is its

“tone.” We often can intuit the tone of a text; from that intuition of tone we can analyze the stylistic resources by which it was produced. We can analyze the style of literary works through consideration of different elements of style; for example, **diction, figures of thought, figures of speech, meter and rhythm, verse form, syntax, point of view.**

**sublime:** As a concept generating a literary movement, the sublime refers to the realm of experience beyond the measurable, and so beyond the rational, produced especially by the terrors and grandeur of natural phenomena. Derived especially from the first-century Greek treatise *On the Sublime*, sometimes attributed to Longinus, the notion of the sublime was in the later eighteenth century a spur to Romanticism.

**syllable:** the smallest unit of sound in a pronounced word. The syllable that receives the greatest stress is called the *tonic* syllable.

**symbol** (Greek “token”): a **figure of thought**. Something that stands for something else, and yet seems necessarily to evoke that other thing. In Neoplatonic, and therefore Romantic, theory, to be distinguished from **allegory** thus: whereas allegory involves connections between vehicle and tenor agreed by convention or made explicit, the meanings of a symbol are supposedly inherent to it.

**synecdoche** (Greek “to take with something else”): a **figure of thought**. Using a part to express the whole, or vice versa; for example, “all hands on deck.” Closely related to **metonymy**.

**syntax** (Greek “ordering with”): Syntax designates the rules by which sentences are constructed in a given language. Discussion of meter is impossible without some reference to syntax, since the overall effect of a poem is, in part, always the product of a subtle balance of meter and sentence construction. Syntax is also essential to the understanding of prose style, since prose writers, deprived of

the full shaping possibilities of meter, rely all the more heavily on syntactic resources. A working command of syntactical practice requires an understanding of the parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, and interjections), since writers exploit syntactic possibilities by using particular combinations and concentrations of the parts of speech.

**taste** (from Italian “touch”): Although medieval monastic traditions used eating and tasting as a metaphor for reading, the concept of taste as a personal ideal to be cultivated by, and applied to, the appreciation and judgment of works of art in general was developed in the eighteenth century.

**tercet:** a **verse form**. A stanza or group of three lines, used in larger forms such as **terza rima**, the **Petrarchan sonnet**, and the **villanelle**.

**terza rima:** a **verse form**. A sequence of rhymed **tercets** linked by rhyme thus: aba bcb cdc, etc. first used extensively by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, the form was adapted in English **iambic pentameters** by Wyatt and revived in the nineteenth century. See Wyatt, “Mine Own John Poins” (vol. B, [p. 131](#)); Shelley, “Ode to the West Wind” (vol. D, p. 802); and Morris, “The Defence of Guinevere” (vol. E, [p. 657](#)). For modern adaptations see Eliot, lines 78–149 (though unrhymed) of “Little Gidding” (vol. F, [pp. 523–25](#)); Heaney, “Station Island” (vol. F, p. 975); Walcott, *Omeros* (vol. F, p. 808).

**tetrameter** (Greek “four measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with four stresses. Coleridge, *Christabel*, line 31: “She stole along, she nothing spoke” (see vol. D, [p. 495](#)).

**theme** (Greek “proposition”): In literary criticism the term designates what the work is about; the theme is the concept that unifies a given work of literature.

**third-person narration:** relevant to **point of view**. A narration in which the narrator recounts a narrative of **characters** referred to

explicitly or implicitly by third-person pronouns ("he," "she," etc.), without the limitation of a **first-person narration**. Thus Johnson, *The History of Rasselas*.

**topographical poem** (Greek "place writing"): a **genre**. A poem devoted to the meditative description of particular places.

**topos** (Greek "place," plural *topoi*): a commonplace in the content of a given kind of literature. Originally, in **classical** rhetoric, the *topoi* were tried-and-tested stimuli to literary invention: lists of standard headings under which a subject might be investigated. In medieval narrative poems, for example, it was commonplace to begin with a description of spring. Writers did, of course, render the commonplace uncommon, as in Chaucer's spring scene at the opening of *The Canterbury Tales* (see vol. A, [p. 474](#)).

**tradition** (from Latin "passing on"): A literary tradition is whatever is passed on or revived from the past in a single literary culture, or drawn from others to enrich a writer's culture. "Tradition" is fluid in reference, ranging from small to large referents: thus it may refer to a relatively small aspect of texts (for example, the tradition of **iambic pentameter**), or it may, at the other extreme, refer to the body of texts that constitute a **canon**.

**tragedy**: a **genre**. A dramatic representation of the fall of kings or nobles, beginning in happiness and ending in catastrophe. Later transferred to other social milieux. The opposite of **comedy**; thus Shakespeare, *Othello* (see vol. B, [p. 640](#)).

**tragic mode**: Many genres (**epic** poetry, **legendary** chronicles, **tragedy**, the **novel**) either do or can participate in a tragic mode, by representing the fall of noble **protagonists** and the irreparable ravages of human society and history.

**tragicomedy**: a **genre**. A play in which potentially tragic events turn out to have a happy, or **comic**, ending. Thus Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*.



**translation** (Latin “carrying across”): the rendering of a text written in one language into another.

**trimeter** (Greek “three measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with three stresses. Herbert, “Discipline,” line 1: “Throw away thy rod” (see vol. B, p. 1195).

**triplet:** a **verse form**. A **tercet** rhyming on the same sound. Pope inserts triplets among heroic **couplets** to emphasize a particular thought; see *Essay on Criticism*, 315–17 (vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

**trochee:** a term of **rhythm**. A two-syllable foot following the pattern, in English verse, of stressed followed by unstressed syllable, producing a falling effect. Thus, for example, “Texas.”

**type** (Greek “impression, figure”): a **figure of thought**. In Christian allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, pre-Christian figures were regarded as “types,” or foreshadowings, of Christ or the Christian dispensation. *Typology* has been the source of much visual and literary art in which the parallelisms between old and new are extended to nonbiblical figures; thus the virtuous plowman in *Piers Plowman* becomes a type of Christ.

**unities:** According to a theory supposedly derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the events represented in a play should have unity of time, place, and action: that the play take up no more time than the time of the play, or at most a day; that the space of action should be within a single city; and that there should be no subplot. See Johnson, *The Preface to Shakespeare* (vol. C, p. 876).

**vernacular** (from Latin *verna*, “servant”): the language of the people, as distinguished from learned and arcane languages. From the later Middle Ages especially, the “vernacular” languages and literatures of Europe distinguished themselves from the learned languages and literatures of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.



**verse form:** The terms related to **meter** and **rhythm** describe the shape of individual lines. Lines of verse are combined to produce larger groupings, called verse forms. These larger groupings are in the first instance **stanzas**. The combination of a certain meter and stanza shape constitutes the verse form, of which there are many standard kinds.

**villanelle:** a **verse form**. A fixed form of usually five **tercets** and a **quatrain** employing only two rhyme sounds altogether, rhyming aba for the tercets and abaa for the quatrain, with a complex pattern of two **refrains**. Derived from a French fixed form. Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (see vol. F, p. 693).

**wit:** Originally a synonym for "reason" in Old and Middle English, "wit" became a literary ideal in the Renaissance as brilliant play of the full range of mental resources. For eighteenth-century writers, the notion necessarily involved pleasing expression, as in Pope's definition of true wit as "Nature to advantage dressed, / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" (*Essay on Criticism*, lines 297–98; see vol. C, [p. 527](#)). Romantic theory of the imagination deprived wit of its full range of apprehension, whence the word came to be restricted to its modern sense, as the clever play of mind that produces laughter.

**zeugma** (Greek "a yoking"): a **figure of thought**. A figure whereby one word applies to two or more words in a sentence, and in which the applications are surprising, either because one is unusual, or because the applications are made in very different ways; Pope, *Rape of the Lock* 3.7–8, in which the word "take" is used in two senses: "Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, / Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea" (see vol. C, [p. 546](#)).

## **B: Publishing History, Censorship**

By the time we read texts in published books, they have already been treated—that is, changed by authors, editors, and printers—in many ways. Although there are differences across history, in each period literary works are subject to pressures of many kinds, which apply before, while, and after an author writes. The pressures might be financial, as in the relations of author and patron; commercial, as in the marketing of books; and legal, as in, during some periods, the negotiation through official and unofficial censorship. In addition, texts in all periods undergo technological processes, as they move from the material forms in which an author produced them to the forms in which they are presented to readers. Some of the terms below designate important material forms in which books were produced, disseminated, and surveyed across the historical span of this anthology. Others designate the skills developed to understand these processes. The anthology's introductions to individual periods discuss the particular forms these phenomena took in different eras.

**bookseller:** In England, and particularly in London, commercial bookmaking and -selling enterprises came into being in the early fourteenth century. These were loose organizations of artisans who usually lived in the same neighborhoods (around St. Paul's Cathedral in London). A bookseller or dealer would coordinate the production of hand-copied books for wealthy patrons (see **patronage**), who would order books to be custom-made. After the introduction of **printing** in the late fifteenth century, authors generally sold the rights to their work to booksellers, without any further **royalties**. Booksellers, who often had their own shops, belonged to the **Stationers' Company**. This system lasted into the eighteenth century. In 1710, however, authors were for the first time granted **copyright**, which tipped the commercial balance in their favor, against booksellers.

**censorship:** The term applies to any mechanism for restricting what can be published. Historically, the reasons for imposing censorship are heresy, sedition, blasphemy, libel, or obscenity. External censorship is imposed by institutions having legislative

sanctions at their disposal. Thus the pre-Reformation Church imposed the Constitutions of Archbishop Arundel of 1409, aimed at repressing the Lollard “heresy.” After the Reformation, some key events in the history of censorship are as follows: 1547, when anti-Lollard legislation and legislation made by Henry VIII concerning treason by writing (1534) were abolished; the Licensing Order of 1643, which legislated that works be licensed, through the Stationers’ Company, prior to publication; and 1695, when the last such Act stipulating prepublication licensing lapsed. Postpublication censorship continued in different periods for different reasons. Thus, for example, British publication of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) was obstructed (though unsuccessfully) in 1960, under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. Censorship can also be international: although not published in Iran, Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1988) was censored in that country, where the leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, proclaimed a fatwa (religious decree) promising the author’s execution. Very often censorship is not imposed externally, however: authors or publishers can censor work in anticipation of what will incur the wrath of readers or the penalties of the law. Victorian and Edwardian publishers of **novels**, for example, urged authors to remove potentially offensive material, especially for serial publication in popular magazines.

**codex:** the physical format of most modern books and medieval manuscripts, consisting of a series of separate leaves gathered into quires and bound together, often with a cover. In late antiquity, the codex largely replaced the scroll, the standard form of written documents in Roman culture.

**copy text:** the particular text of a work used by a textual editor as the basis of an edition of that work.

**copyright:** the legal protection afforded to authors for control of their work’s publication, in an attempt to ensure due financial reward. Some key dates in the history of copyright in the United Kingdom are as follows: 1710, when a statute gave authors the

exclusive right to publish their work for fourteen years, and fourteen years more if the author were still alive when the first term had expired; 1842, when the period of authorial control was extended to forty-two years; and 1911, when the term was extended yet further, to fifty years after the author's death. In 1995 the period of protection was harmonized with the laws in other European countries to be the life of the author plus seventy years. In the United States no works first published before 1923 are in copyright. Works published since 1978 are, as in the United Kingdom, protected for the life of the author plus seventy years.

**folio:** the leaf formed by both sides of a single page. Each folio has two sides: a *recto* (the front side of the leaf, on the right side of a double-page spread in an open codex), and a *verso* (the back side of the leaf, on the left side of a double-page spread). Modern book pagination follows the pattern 1, 2, 3, 4, while medieval manuscript pagination follows the pattern 1r, 1v, 2r, 2v. "Folio" can also designate the size of a printed book. Books come in different shapes, depending originally on the number of times a standard sheet of paper is folded. One fold produces a large volume, a *folio* book; two folds produce a *quarto*, four an *octavo*, and six a very small *duodecimo*. Generally speaking, the larger the book, the grander and more expensive. Shakespeare's plays were, for example, first printed in quartos, but were gathered into a folio edition in 1623.

**foul papers:** versions of a work before an author has produced, if she or he has, a final copy (a "fair copy") with all corrections removed.

**incunabulum** (plural "incunabula"): any printed book produced in Europe before 1501. Famous incunabula include the Gutenberg Bible, printed in 1455.

**manuscript** (Latin, "written by hand"): Any text written physically by hand is a manuscript. Before the introduction of **printing** with moveable type in 1476, all texts in England were produced and

reproduced by hand, in manuscript. This is an extremely labor-intensive task, using expensive materials (for example, **vellum**, or **parchment**); the cost of books produced thereby was, accordingly, very high. Even after the introduction of printing, many texts continued to be produced in manuscript. This is obviously true of letters, for example, but until the eighteenth century, poetry written within aristocratic circles was often transmitted in manuscript copies.

**paleography** (Greek “ancient writing”): the art of deciphering, describing, and dating forms of handwriting.

**parchment:** animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **vellum**.

**patronage, patron** (Latin “protector”): Many technological, legal, and commercial supports were necessary before professional authorship became possible. Although some playwrights (for example, Shakespeare) made a living by writing for the theater, other authors needed, principally, the large-scale reproductive capacities of **printing** and the security of **copyright** to make a living from writing. Before these conditions obtained, many authors had another main occupation, and most authors had to rely on patronage. In different periods, institutions or individuals offered material support, or patronage, to authors. Thus in Anglo-Saxon England, monasteries afforded the conditions of writing to monastic authors. Between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries, the main source of patronage was the royal court. Authors offered patrons prestige and ideological support in return for financial support. Even as the conditions of professional authorship came into being at the beginning of the eighteenth century, older forms of direct patronage were not altogether displaced until the middle of the century.

**periodical:** Whereas journalism, strictly, applies to daily writing (from French *jour*, “day”), periodical writing appears at larger, but

still frequent, intervals, characteristically in the form of the **essay**. Periodicals were developed especially in the eighteenth century.

**printing:** Printing, or the mechanical reproduction of books using moveable type, was invented in Germany in the mid-fifteenth century by Johannes Gutenberg; it quickly spread throughout Europe. William Caxton brought printing into England from the Low Countries in 1476. Much greater powers of reproduction at much lower prices transformed every aspect of literary culture.

**publisher:** the person or company responsible for the commissioning and publicizing of printed matter. In the early period of **printing**, publisher, printer, and bookseller were often the same person. This trend continued in the ascendancy of the **Stationers' Company**, between the middle of the sixteenth and the end of the seventeenth centuries. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, these three functions began to separate, leading to their modern distinctions.

**quire:** When medieval manuscripts were assembled, a few loose sheets of parchment or paper would first be folded together and sewn along the fold. This formed a quire (also known as a "gathering" or "signature"). Folded in this way, four large sheets of parchment would produce eight smaller manuscript leaves. Multiple quires could then be bound together to form a codex.

**royalties:** an agreed-upon proportion of the price of each copy of a work sold, paid by the publisher to the author, or an agreed-upon fee paid to the playwright for each performance of a play.

**scribe:** In **manuscript** culture, the scribe is the copyist who reproduces a text by hand.

**scriptorium** (plural "scriptoria"): a place for producing written documents and manuscripts.

**serial publication:** generally referring to the practice, especially common in the nineteenth century, of publishing novels a few chapters at a time, in periodicals.

**Stationers' Company:** The Stationers' Company was an English guild incorporating various tradesmen, including printers, publishers, and booksellers, skilled in the production and selling of books. It was formed in 1403, received its royal charter in 1557, and served as a means both of producing and of regulating books. Authors would sell the manuscripts of their books to individual stationers, who incurred the risks and took the profits of producing and selling the books. The stationers entered their rights over given books in the Stationers' Register. They also regulated the book trade and held their monopoly by licensing books and by being empowered to seize unauthorized books and imprison resisters. This system of licensing broke down in the social unrest of the Civil War and Interregnum (1640–60), and it ended in 1695. Even after the end of licensing, the Stationers' Company continued to be an intrinsic part of the **copyright** process, since the 1710 copyright statute directed that copyright had to be registered at Stationers' Hall.

**subscription:** An eighteenth-century system of bookselling somewhere between direct **patronage** and impersonal sales. A subscriber paid half the cost of a book before publication and half on delivery. The author received these payments directly. The subscriber's name appeared in the prefatory pages.

**textual criticism:** Works in all periods often exist in many subtly or not so subtly different forms. This is especially true with regard to manuscript textual reproduction, but it also applies to printed texts. Textual criticism is the art, developed from the fifteenth century in Italy but raised to new levels of sophistication from the eighteenth century, of deciphering different historical states of texts. This art involves the analysis of textual **variants**, often with the aim of distinguishing authorial from scribal forms.

**variants:** differences that appear among different manuscripts or printed editions of the same text.

**vellum:** animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **parchment**.

**watermark:** the trademark of a paper manufacturer, impressed into the paper but largely invisible unless held up to light.

## Endnotes

- Note \*: This appendix was devised and compiled by James Simpson with the collaboration of all the editors. We especially thank Professor Lara Bovilsky of the University of Oregon at Eugene, for her help.[Return to reference \\*](#)



# Geographic Nomenclature

**The British Isles** refers to the prominent group of islands off the northwest coast of Europe, especially to the two largest, **Great Britain** and **Ireland**. At present these comprise two sovereign states: **the Republic of Ireland**, and **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**—known for short as the **United Kingdom** or the **U.K.** Most of the smaller islands are part of the **U.K.** but a few, like the **Isle of Man** and the tiny **Channel Islands**, are largely independent. The **U.K.** is often loosely referred to as “**Britain**” or “**Great Britain**” and is sometimes called simply, if inaccurately, “**England**.” For obvious reasons, the latter usage is rarely heard among the inhabitants of the other countries of the **U.K.—Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland** (sometimes called **Ulster**). England is by far the most populous part of the kingdom, as well as the seat of its capital, London.

From the first to the fifth century C.E. most of what is now **England** and **Wales** was a province of the Roman Empire called **Britain** (in Latin, **Britannia**). After the fall of Rome, much of the island was invaded and settled by peoples from northern Germany and Denmark speaking what we now call Old English. These peoples are known as the Angles and the Saxons (the word **England** is related to **Angles**). By the time of the Norman Conquest (1066) most of the kingdoms founded by the Angles, the Saxons, and the subsequent Viking invaders had coalesced into the kingdom of **England**, which, in the latter Middle Ages, conquered and largely absorbed the neighboring Celtic kingdom of **Wales**. In 1603 James VI of **Scotland** inherited the island’s other throne as James I of **England**, and for the next hundred years—except for the two decades of Puritan rule—**Scotland** (both its English-speaking **Lowlands** and its Gaelic-speaking **Highlands**) and **England** (with **Wales**) were two kingdoms under a single king. In 1707 the Act of Union brought them together as **the United Kingdom of Great**

**Britain. Ireland**, where English rule had begun in the twelfth century and been tightened in the sixteenth, was incorporated by the 1800–1801 Act of Union into **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**. With the division of Ireland and the establishment of **the Irish Free State** after World War I, this name was modified to its present form, and in 1949 **the Irish Free State** became **the Republic of Ireland**, or **Éire**. In 1999 **Scotland** elected a separate parliament it had relinquished in 1707, and **Wales** elected an assembly it lost in 1409; neither Scotland nor Wales ceased to be part of the **United Kingdom**.

The **British Isles** are further divided into counties, which in **Great Britain** are also known as shires. This word, with its vowel shortened in pronunciation, forms the suffix in the names of many counties, such as **Yorkshire, Wiltshire, Somersetshire**.

The Latin names **Britannia (Britain), Caledonia (Scotland),** and **Hibernia (Ireland)** are sometimes used in poetic diction; so too is **Britain's** ancient Celtic name, **Albion**. Because of its accidental resemblance to *albus* (Latin for “white”), **Albion** is especially associated with the chalk cliffs that seem to gird much of the English coast like defensive walls.

**The British Empire** took its name from **the British Isles** because it was created not only by the **English** but also by the **Irish, Scots, and Welsh**, as well as by civilians and servicemen from other constituent countries of the empire. Some of the empire's **overseas colonies**, or **crown colonies**, were populated largely by settlers of European origin and their descendants. These predominantly White **settler colonies**, such as **Canada, Australia,** and **New Zealand**, were allowed significant self-government in the nineteenth century and recognized as **dominions** in the early twentieth century. The **White dominions** became members of **the Commonwealth of Nations**, also called **the Commonwealth, the British Commonwealth,** and “**the Old Commonwealth**” at different times, an association of sovereign states under the symbolic leadership of the British monarch.

Other **overseas colonies** of the empire had mostly Indigenous populations (or, in the Caribbean, the descendants of enslaved people, indentured servants, and others). These **colonies** were granted political independence after World War II, later than the **dominions**, and have often been referred to since as **postcolonial** nations. In South and Southeast Asia, **India** and **Pakistan** gained independence in 1947, followed by other countries including **Sri Lanka** (formerly **Ceylon**), **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), **Malaya** (now **Malaysia**), and **Singapore**. In West and East Africa, the **Gold Coast** was decolonized as **Ghana** in 1957, **Nigeria** in 1960, **Sierra Leone** in 1961, **Uganda** in 1962, **Kenya** in 1963, and so forth, while in southern Africa, the White minority government of **South Africa** was already independent in 1931, though majority rule did not come until 1994. In the Caribbean, **Jamaica** and **Trinidad and Tobago** became independent in 1962, followed by **Barbados** in 1966, and other islands of the British West Indies in the 1970s and '80s. Other regions from which nations emerged out of British colonial rule included Central America (**British Honduras**, now **Belize**), South America (**British Guiana**, now **Guyana**), the Pacific islands (**Fiji**), and Europe (**Cyprus**, **Malta**). After decolonization, many of these nations chose to remain within a newly conceived **Commonwealth** and are sometimes referred to as "**New Commonwealth**" countries. Some nations, such as **Ireland**, **Pakistan**, and **South Africa**, withdrew from the **Commonwealth**, though **South Africa** and **Paki stan** eventually rejoined, and others, such as **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), gained independence outside the **Commonwealth**. Britain's last major overseas colony, **Hong Kong**, was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, but while Britain retains only a handful of dependent territories, such as **Bermuda** and **Montserrat**, the scope of the **Commonwealth** remains vast, with approximately 30 percent of the world's population.

# British Money

One of the most dramatic changes to the system of British money came in 1971. In the system previously in place, the pound consisted of 20 shillings, each containing 12 pence, making 240 pence to the pound. Since 1971, British money has been calculated on the decimal system, with 100 pence to the pound. Britons' experience of paper money did not change very drastically: as before, 5- and 10-pound notes constitute the majority of bills passing through their hands (in addition, 20- and 50-pound notes have been added). But the shift necessitated a whole new way of thinking about and exchanging coins and marked the demise of the shilling, one of the fundamental units of British monetary history. Many other coins, still frequently encountered in literature, had already passed. These include the groat, worth 4 pence (the word "groat" is often used to signify a trifling sum); the angel (which depicted the archangel Michael triumphing over a dragon), valued at 10 shillings; the mark, worth in its day two-thirds of a pound or 13 shillings 4 pence; and the sovereign, a gold coin initially worth 22 shillings 6 pence, later valued at 1 pound, last circulated in 1932. One prominent older coin, the guinea, was worth a pound and a shilling; though it has not been minted since 1813, a very few quality items or prestige awards (like the purse in a horse race) may still be quoted in guineas. (The table below includes some other obsolete coins.) Colloquially, a pound was (and is) called a quid; a shilling a bob; sixpence, a tanner; a copper could refer to a penny, a half-penny, or a farthing ( $\frac{1}{4}$  penny).

<i>Old Currency</i>	<i>New Currency</i>
1 pound note	1 pound coin (or note in Scotland)
10 shilling (half-pound note)	50 pence
5 shilling (crown)	
21/2 shilling (half crown)	20 pence
2 shilling (florin)	10 pence
1 shilling	5 pence
6 pence	
21/2 pence	1 penny
2 pence	
1 penny	

1/2 penny	
1/4 penny (farthing)	

Throughout its tenure as a member of the European Union (1973–2020), Britain contemplated but did not make the change to the EU's common currency, the Euro, reflecting many Britons' strong identification of their country with its rich commercial history and view of their currency as a national symbol.

Even more challenging than sorting out the values of obsolete coins is calculating for any given period the purchasing power of money, which fluctuates over time by its very nature. As difficult as it is to generalize, it is clear that money used to be worth much more than it is currently. During the early Middle Ages, the most valuable circulating coin was the silver penny: four would buy a sheep. Beyond long-term inflationary trends, prices varied from times of plenty to those marked by poor harvests; from peacetime to wartime; from the country to the metropolis (life in London has always been very expensive); and wages varied according to the availability of labor (wages would sharply rise, for instance, during the devastating Black Death in the fourteenth century). The following chart provides a glimpse of some actual prices of given periods and their changes across time, though all the variables mentioned above prevent them from being definitive. Even from one year to the next, an added tax on gin or tea could drastically raise prices, and a lottery ticket could cost much more the night before the drawing than just a month earlier. Still, the prices quoted below do indicate important trends, such as the disparity of incomes in British society and the costs of basic commodities. In the chart on the following pages, the symbol £ is used for pound, s. for shilling, d. for a penny (from Latin *denarius*); a sum would normally be written £2.19.3—that is 2 pounds, 19 shillings, 3 pence. (This is Leopold Bloom's budget for the day depicted in Joyce's novel *Ulysses* [1922]; in the new currency, it would be about £2.96.)

circa	1390	1590	1650	1750	1815	1875
<i>food and drink</i>	gallon (8 pints) of ale, 1.5d.	tankard of beer, .5d.	coffee, 1d. a dish	"drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two-pence" (gin shop sign in Hogarth print)	ounce of laudanum, 3d.	pint of beer, 3d.
	gallon (8 pints) of wine, 3 to 4d.	pound of beef, 2s. 5d.	chicken, 1s. 4d.	dinner at a steakhouse, 1s.	ham and potato dinner for two, 7s.	dinner in a good hotel, 5s.
	pound of cinnamon, 1 to 3s.	pound of cinnamon, 10s. 6d.	pound of tea, £3 10s.	pound of tea, 16s.	bottle of French claret, 12s.	pound of tea, 2s.

<i>entertainment</i>	no cost to watch a cycle play	admission to public theater, 1 to 3d.	falcon, £11 5s.	theater tickets, 1 to 5s.	admission to Covent Garden theater, 1 to 7s.	theater tickets, 6d. to 7s.
	contributory admission to professional troupe theater	cheap seat in private theater, 6d.	billiard table, £25	admission to Vauxhall Gardens, 1s.	annual subscription to Almack's (exclusive club), 10 guineas	admission to Madam Tussaud's waxworks, 1s.
	maintenance for royal hounds at Windsor, .75d. a day	"to see a dead Indian" ( <i>The Tempest</i> 2.2.32), 1.25d. (ten "doits")	three-quarter length portrait painting, £31	lottery ticket, £20 (shares were sold)	Jane Austen's piano, 30 guineas	annual fees at a gentleman's club, 7 to 10 guineas
<i>reading</i>	cheap romance, 1s.	play quarto, 6d.	pamphlet, 1 to 6d.	issue of <i>The Gentleman's Magazine</i> , 6d.	issue of <i>Edinburgh Review</i> , 6s.	copy of the <i>Times</i> , 3d.
	a Latin Bible, 2 to £4	Shakespeare's <i>First Folio</i> (1623), £1	student Bible, 6s.	cheap edition of Milton, 2s.	membership in circulating library (3rd class), £1 4s. a year	illustrated edition of <i>Through the Looking-glass</i> , 6s.
	payment for illuminating a liturgical book, £22 9s.	Foxe's <i>Acts and Monuments</i> , 24s.	Hobbes's <i>Leviathan</i> , 8s.	Johnson's <i>Dictionary</i> , folio, 2 vols., £4 10s.	1st edition of Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , 18s.	1st edition of Trollope's <i>The Way We Live Now</i> , 2 vols., £1 1s.
<i>transportation</i>	night's supply of hay for horse, 2d.	wherry (whole boat) across Thames, 1d.	day's journey, coach, 10s.	boat across Thames, 4d.	coach ride, outside, 2 to 3d. a mile; inside, 4 to 5d. a mile	15-minute journey in a London cab, 1s. 6d.

	coach, £8	hiring a horse for a day, 12d.	coach horse, £30	coach fare, London to Edinburgh, £4 10s.	palanquin transport in Madras, 5s. a day	railway, 3rd class, London to Plymouth, 18s. 8d. (about 1d. a mile)
	quality horse, £10	hiring a coach for a day, 10s.	fancy carriage, £170	transport to America, £5	passage, Liverpool to New York, £10	passage to India, 1st class, £50
<i>clothes</i>	clothing allowance for peasant, 3s. a year	shoes with buckles, 8d.	footman's frieze coat, 15s.	working woman's gown, 6s. 6d.	checked muslin, 7s. per yard	flannel for a cheap petticoat, 1s. 3d. a yard
	shoes for gentry wearer, 4d.	woman's gloves, £1 5s.	falconer's hat, 10s.	gentleman's suit, £8	hiring a dressmaker for a pelisse, 8s.	overcoat for an Eton schoolboy, £1 1s.
	hat for gentry wearer, 10d.	fine cloak, £16	black cloth for mourning household of an earl, £100	very fine wig, £30	ladies silk stockings, 12s.	set of false teeth, £2 10s.
<i>labor/incomes</i>	hiring a skilled building worker, 4d. a day	actor's daily wage during playing season, 1s.	agricultural laborer, 6s. 5d. a week	price of enslaved boy, £32	lowest-paid sailor on Royal Navy ship, 10s. 9d. a month	seasonal agricultural laborer, 14s. a week
	wage for professional scribe, £2 3s. 4d. a year + cloak	household servant 2 to £5 a year + food, clothing	tutor to nobleman's children, £30 a year	housemaid's wage, £6 to £8 a year	contributor to <i>Quarterly Review</i> , 10 guineas per sheet	housemaid's wage, £10 to £25 a year

	minimum income to be called gentleman, £10 a year; for knighthood, 40 to £400	minimum income for eligibility for knighthood, £30 a year	Milton's salary as Secretary of Foreign Tongues, £288 a year	Boswell's allowance, £200 a year	minimum income for a "genteel" family, £100 a year	income of the "comfortable" classes, £800 and up a year
	income from land of richest magnates, £3,500 a year	income from land of average earl, £4,000 a year	Earl of Bedford's income, £8,000 a year	Duke of Newcastle's income, £40,000 a year	Mr. Darcy's income, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , £10,000	Trollope's income, £4,000 a year



# The British Baronage

The English monarchy is in principle hereditary, though at times during the Middle Ages the rules were subject to dispute. As it stands now, authority passes from parent to eldest surviving child, to siblings in order of seniority if there are no children, and in default of direct descendants to collateral lines (cousins, nephews, nieces) in order of closeness. There have been breaks in the order of succession (1066, 1399, 1688), but so far as possible the usurpers have always sought to paper over the break with a legitimate, that is, hereditary, claim. When a queen succeeds to the throne and takes a husband, he does not become king unless he is in the line of blood succession; rather, he is named prince consort, as Albert was to Victoria. He may be the father of kings, but he is not one himself.

The original Saxon nobles were the king's thanes, ealdormen, or earls, who provided the king with military service and counsel in return for booty, gifts, or landed estates. William the Conqueror, arriving from France, where feudalism was fully developed, considerably expanded this group. In addition, as the king distributed the lands of his new kingdom, he also distributed dignities to men who became known collectively as "the baronage." "Baron" in its root meaning signifies simply "man," and barons were the king's men. As the title was common, a distinction was early made between greater and lesser barons, the former gradually assuming loftier and more impressive titles. The first English "duke" was created in 1337; the title of "marquess," or "marquis" (pronounced "markwis"), followed in 1385, and "viscount" ("vyekount") in 1440. Though "earl" is the oldest title of all, an earl now comes between a marquess and a viscount in order of dignity and precedence, and the old term "baron" now designates a rank just below viscount. "Baronets" were created in 1611 as a means of raising revenue for the crown (the title could be purchased for about

£1,000); they are marginal nobility and have never sat in the House of Lords.

Kings and queens are addressed as “Your Majesty,” princes and princesses as “Your Highness,” the other hereditary nobility as “My Lord” or “Your Lordship.” Peers receive their titles either by inheritance (like Lord Byron, the sixth baron of that line) or from the monarch (like Alfred, Lord Tennyson, created 1st Baron Tennyson by Victoria). The children, even of a duke, are commoners unless they are specifically granted some other title or inherit their father’s title from him. A peerage can be forfeited by act of attainder, as for example when a lord is convicted of treason; and, when forfeited, or lapsed for lack of a successor, can be bestowed on another family. Thus in 1605 Robert Cecil was made first Earl of Salisbury in the third creation, the first creation dating from 1149, the second from 1337, the title having been in abeyance since 1539. Titles descend by right of succession and do not depend on tenure of land; thus, a title does not always indicate where a lord dwells or holds power. Indeed, noble titles do not always refer to a real place at all. At Prince Edward’s marriage in 1999, the queen created him Earl of Wessex, although the old kingdom of Wessex has had no political existence since 1066, and the name was all but forgotten until it was resurrected by Thomas Hardy as the setting of his novels. (This is perhaps but one of many ways in which the world of the aristocracy increasingly resembles the realm of literature.)

The king and queen	(These are all of the royal line.)
Prince and princess	

Duke and duchess	(These may or may not be of the royal line, but are ordinarily remote from the succession.)
Marquess and marchioness	
Earl and countess	
Viscount and viscountess	
Baron and baroness	
Baronet and lady	

Scottish peers sat in the parliament of Scotland, as English peers did in the parliament of England, till at the Act of Union (1707) Scottish peers were granted sixteen seats in the English House of Lords, to be filled by election. (In 1963, all Scottish lords were allowed to sit.) Similarly, Irish peers, when the Irish parliament was abolished in 1801, were granted the right to elect twenty-eight of their number to the House of Lords in Westminster. (Now that the Republic of Ireland is a separate nation, this no longer applies.) Women members (peeresses) were first allowed to sit in the House as nonhereditary Life Peers in 1958 (when that status was created for members of both genders); women first sat by their own hereditary right in 1963. Today the House of Lords still retains some power to influence or delay legislation, but its future is uncertain. In 1999, the hereditary peers (then amounting to 750) were reduced to 92

temporary members elected by their fellow peers. Holders of Life Peerages remain, as do senior bishops of the Church of England and high-court judges (the "Law Lords").

Below the peerage the chief title of honor is "knight." Knighthood, which is not hereditary, is generally a reward for services rendered. A knight (Sir John Black) is addressed, using his first name, as "Sir John"; his wife, using the last name, is "Lady Black"—unless she is the daughter of an earl or nobleman of higher rank, in which case she will be "Lady Arabella." The female equivalent of a knight bears the title of "Dame." Though the word *knight* itself comes from the Old English *cniht*, there is some doubt as to whether knighthood amounted to much before the arrival of the Normans. The feudal system required military service as a condition of land tenure, and a man who came to serve his king at the head of an army of tenants required a title of authority and badges of identity—hence the title of knighthood and the coat of arms. During the Crusades, when men were far removed from their land (or even sold it in order to go on crusade), more elaborate forms of fealty sprang up that soon expanded into orders of knighthood. The Templars, Hospitallers, Knights of the Teutonic Order, Knights of Malta, and Knights of the Golden Fleece were but a few of these companionships; not all of them were available at all times in England.

Gradually, with the rise of centralized government and the decline of feudal tenures, military knighthood became obsolete, and the rank largely honorific; sometimes, as under James I, it degenerated into a scheme of the royal government for making money. For hundreds of years after its establishment in the fourteenth century, the Order of the Garter was the only English order of knighthood, an exclusive courtly companionship. Then, during the late seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the nineteenth centuries, a number of additional orders were created, with names such as the Thistle, Saint Patrick, the Bath, Saint Michael, and Saint George, plus a number of special Victorian and Indian orders. They retain the terminology, ceremony, and dignity of knighthood, but the military implications are vestigial.

Although the British Empire now belongs to history, appointments to the Order of the British Empire continue to be conferred for services to that empire at home or abroad. Such honors (commonly referred to as "gongs") are granted by the monarch in New Year's and Birthday lists, but the decisions are now made by the government in power. In recent years there have been efforts to popularize and democratize the dispensation of honors, with recipients including celebrities of all types. But this does not prevent large sectors of British society from regarding both knighthood and the peerage as largely irrelevant to modern life.

# **The Royal Lines of England and Great Britain**

## ***England***

### **SAXONS AND DANES**

Egbert, king of Wessex802–839

Ethelwulf, son of Egbert839–858

Ethelbald, second son of Ethelwulf858–860

Ethelbert, third son of Ethelwulf860–866

Ethelred I, fourth son of Ethelwulf866–871

Alfred the Great, fifth son of Ethelwulf871–899

Edward the Elder, son of Alfred899–924

Athelstan the Glorious, son of Edward924–940

Edmund I, third son of Edward940–946

Edred, fourth son of Edward946–955

Edwy the Fair, son of Edmund955–959

Edgar the Peaceful, second son of Edmund959–975

Edward the Martyr, son of Edgar975–978 (murdered)

Ethelred II, the Unready, second son of Edgar978–1016

Edmund II, Ironside, son of Ethelred II1016–1016

Canute the Dane1016–1035

Harold I, Harefoot, natural son of Canute1035–1040

Hardecanute, son of Canute1040–1042

Edward the Confessor, son of Ethelred II1042–1066

Harold II, brother-in-law of Edward1066–1066 (died in battle)

## **HOUSE OF NORMANDY**

William I, the Conqueror1066–1087

William II, Rufus, third son of William I1087–1100 (shot from ambush)

Henry I, Beauclerc, youngest son of William I1100–1135

## **HOUSE OF BLOIS**

Stephen, son of Adela, daughter of William I1135–1154

## **HOUSE OF PLANTAGENET**

Henry II, son of Geoffrey Plantagenet by Matilda, daughter of Henry I1154–1189

Richard I, Coeur de Lion, son of Henry II1189–1199

John Lackland, son of Henry II1199–1216

Henry III, son of John1216–1272

Edward I, Longshanks, son of Henry III1272–1307

Edward II, son of Edward I 1307–1327 (deposed)

Edward III of Windsor, son of Edward II 1327–1377

Richard II, grandson of Edward III 1377–1399 (deposed)

## **HOUSE OF LANCASTER**

Henry IV, son of John of Gaunt, son of Edward III 1399–1413

Henry V, Prince Hal, son of Henry IV 1413–1422

Henry VI, son of Henry V 1422–1461 (deposed),

1470–1471 (deposed)

## **HOUSE OF YORK**

Edward IV, great-great-grandson of Edward III 1461–1470  
(deposed),

1471–1483

Edward V, son of Edward IV 1483–1483 (murdered)

Richard III, Crookback 1483–1485 (died in battle)

## **HOUSE OF TUDOR**

Henry VII, married daughter of Edward IV 1485–1509

Henry VIII, son of Henry VII 1509–1547

Edward VI, son of Henry VIII 1547–1553

Mary I, "Bloody," daughter of Henry VIII 1553–1558



Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry VIII 1558–1603

## **HOUSE OF STUART**

James I (James VI of Scotland) 1603–1625

Charles I, son of James I 1625–1649 (executed)

## **COMMONWEALTH & PROTECTORATE**

Council of State 1649–1653

Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector 1653–1658

Richard Cromwell, son of Oliver 1658–1660 (resigned)

## **HOUSE OF STUART (RESTORED)**

Charles II, son of Charles I 1660–1685

James II, second son of Charles I 1685–1688

## **(INTERREGNUM, 11 DECEMBER 1688 TO 13 FEBRUARY 1689)**

## **HOUSE OF ORANGE-NASSAU**

William III of Orange, by  
Mary, daughter of Charles I  
and Mary II, daughter of James II 1689–1701–1694

Anne, second daughter of James II 1702–1714

## *Great Britain*

### **HOUSE OF HANOVER**

George I, son of Elector of Hanover and Sophia, granddaughter of James I 1714–1727

George II, son of George I 1727–1760

George III, grandson of George II 1760–1820

George IV, son of George III 1820–1830

William IV, third son of George III 1830–1837

Victoria, daughter of Edward, fourth son of George III 1837–1901

### **HOUSE OF SAXE-COBURG AND GOTHA**

Edward VII, son of Victoria 1901–1910

### **HOUSE OF WINDSOR (NAME ADOPTED 17 JULY 1917)**

George V, second son of Edward VII 1910–1936

Edward VIII, eldest son of George V 1936–1936 (abdicated)

George VI, second son of George V 1936–1952

Elizabeth II, daughter of George VI 1952–2022

Charles III, son of Elizabeth II 2022–

# Religions in Great Britain

In the late sixth century C.E., missionaries from Rome introduced Christianity to Britons—actually, reintroduced it, since it had briefly flourished in the southern parts of the British Isles during the Roman occupation, and even after the Roman withdrawal had persisted in the Celtic regions of Scotland and Wales. By the time the earliest poems included in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* were composed (the seventh century), therefore, there had been a Christian presence in the British Isles for hundreds of years. The conversion of the Germanic occupiers of England can, however, be dated only from 597. Our knowledge of the religion of pre-Christian Britain is sketchy, but it is likely that vestiges of Germanic polytheism assimilated into, or coexisted with, the practice of Christianity: fertility rites were incorporated into the celebration of Easter resurrection, rituals commemorating the dead into All-Hallows Eve and All Saints Day, and elements of winter solstice festivals into the celebration of Christmas. The most durable polytheistic remains are the days of the week, each of which except “Saturday” derives from the name of a Germanic pagan god, and the word “Easter,” deriving, according to the great monastic scholar Bede (ca. 673–735), from the name of a Germanic pagan goddess, Eostre. In English literature such “folkloric” elements sometimes elicit romantic nostalgia. Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath” looks back to a magical time before the arrival of Christianity in which the land was “fulfild of fairye.” Hundreds of years later, the seventeenth-century writer Robert Herrick honors the amalgamation of Christian and pagan elements in agrarian British culture in such poems as “Corinna’s Gone A-Maying” and “The Hock Cart.”

Medieval Christianity was fairly uniform, if complex, across Western Europe—hence called “catholic,” or universally shared. The Church was composed of the so-called “regular” and “secular” orders, the regular orders being those who followed a rule in a

community under an abbot or an abbess (that is, monks, nuns, friars, and canons), while the secular clergy of priests served parish communities under the governance of a bishop. In the unstable period from the sixth until the twelfth century, monasteries were the intellectual powerhouse of the Church. From the beginning of the thirteenth century, with the development of an urban Christian spirituality in Europe, friars dominated the recently invented institution of universities, as well as devoting themselves, in theory at least, to the urban poor.

The Catholic Church was also an international power structure. With its hierarchy of pope, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, it offered a model of the centralized, bureaucratic state from the late eleventh century. That ecclesiastical power structure coexisted alongside a separate, often less centralized and feudal structure of lay authorities, with theoretically different and often competing spheres of social responsibilities. The sharing of lay and ecclesiastical authority in medieval England was sometimes a source of conflict. Chaucer's pilgrims are on their way to visit the memorial shrine to one victim of such exemplary struggle: Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, who opposed the policies of King Henry II, was assassinated by indirect suggestion of the king in 1170, and later made a saint. The Church, in turn, produced its own victims: Jews were subject to persecution in the late twelfth century in England, before being expelled in 1290. From the beginning of the fifteenth century, the English Church targeted Lollard heretics (see below) with capital punishment, for the first time.

As an international organization, the Church conducted its business in the universal language of Latin. Thus although in the period the largest segment of literate persons was made up of clerics, the clerical contribution to great literary writing in vernacular languages (for example, French and English) was, so far as we know, relatively modest, with some great exceptions in the later Middle Ages (for example, William Langland). Lay, vernacular writers of the period certainly reflect the importance of the Church as an institution and the pervasiveness of religion in the rituals that marked everyday life, as well as contesting institutional authority. From the late

fourteenth century, indeed, England witnessed an active and articulate, proto-Protestant movement known as Lollardy, which attacked clerical hierarchy and promoted vernacular scriptures.

Beginning in 1517 the German monk Martin Luther, in Wittenberg, Germany, openly challenged many aspects of Catholic practice and by 1520 had completely repudiated the authority of the pope, setting in motion the Protestant Reformation. Luther argued that the Roman Catholic Church had strayed far from the pattern of Christianity laid out in scripture. He rejected Catholic doctrines for which no biblical authority was to be found, such as the belief in Purgatory, and translated the Bible into German, on the grounds that the importance of scripture for all Christians made its translation into the vernacular tongue essential. Luther was not the first to advance such views—Lollard followers of the Englishman John Wycliffe had translated the Bible in the late fourteenth century. But Luther, protected by powerful German rulers, was able to speak out without fear of punishment and convert others to his views, rather than suffer the persecution usually meted out to heretics. Soon other reformers were following in Luther's footsteps: of these, the Swiss Ulrich Zwingli and the French Jean Calvin would be especially influential for English religious thought.

At first England remained staunchly Catholic. Its king, Henry VIII, was so severe to heretics that the pope awarded him the title "Defender of the Faith," which British monarchs have retained to this day. In 1534, however, Henry rejected the authority of the pope to prevent his divorce from his queen, Catherine of Aragon, and his marriage to his mistress, Ann Boleyn. In doing so, Henry appropriated to himself ecclesiastical as well as secular authority. Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, was executed in 1535 for refusing to endorse Henry's right to govern the English church. Over the following six years, Henry consolidated his grip on the ecclesiastical establishment by dissolving the powerful, populous Catholic monasteries and redistributing their massive landholdings to his own lay followers. Yet Henry's church largely retained Catholic doctrine and liturgy. When Henry died and his young son, Edward, came to the throne in 1547, the English church embarked on a more

Protestant path, a direction abruptly reversed when Edward died and his older sister Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, took the throne in 1553 and attempted to reintroduce Roman Catholicism. Mary's reign was also short, however, and her successor, Elizabeth I, the daughter of Ann Boleyn, was a Protestant. Elizabeth attempted to establish a "middle way" Christianity, compromising between Roman Catholic practices and beliefs and reformed ones.

The Church of England, though it laid claim to a national rather than pan-European authority, aspired like its predecessor to be the universal church of all English subjects. It retained the Catholic structure of parishes and dioceses and the Catholic hierarchy of bishops, though the ecclesiastical authority was now the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Church's "Supreme Governor" was the monarch. Yet disagreement and controversy persisted. Some members of the Church of England wanted to retain many of the ritual and liturgical elements of Catholicism. Others, the Puritans, advocated a more thoroughgoing reformation. Most Puritans remained within the Church of England, but a minority, the "Separatists" or "Congregationalists," split from the established church altogether. These dissenters no longer thought of the ideal church as an organization to which everybody belonged; instead, they conceived it as a more exclusive group of likeminded people, one not necessarily attached to a larger body of believers.

In the seventeenth century, the succession of the Scottish king James to the English throne produced another problem. England and Scotland were separate nations, and in the sixteenth century Scotland had developed its own national Presbyterian church, or "kirk," under the leadership of the reformer John Knox. The kirk retained fewer Catholic liturgical elements than did the Church of England, and its authorities, or "presbyters," were elected by assemblies of their fellow clerics, rather than appointed by the king. James I and his son Charles I, especially the latter, wanted to bring the Scottish kirk into conformity with Church of England practices. The Scots violently resisted these efforts, with the collaboration of many English Puritans, in a conflict that eventually developed into the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. The effect of

these disputes is visible in the poetry of such writers as John Milton, Robert Herrick, Henry Vaughan, and Thomas Traherne, and in the prose of Thomas Browne, Lucy Hutchinson, and Dorothy Waugh. Just as in the mid-sixteenth century, when a succession of monarchs with different religious commitments destabilized the church, so the seventeenth century endured spiritual whiplash. King Charles I's highly ritualistic Church of England was violently overturned by the Puritan victors in the Civil War—until 1660, after the death of the Puritan leader, Oliver Cromwell, when the Church of England was restored along with the monarchy.

The religious and political upheavals of the seventeenth century produced Christian sects that de-emphasized the ceremony of the established church and rejected as well its top-down authority structure. Some of these groups were ephemeral, but the Baptists (founded in 1608 in Amsterdam by the English expatriate John Smyth) and Quakers, or Society of Friends (founded by George Fox in the 1640s), flourished outside the established church, sometimes despite cruel persecution. John Bunyan, a Baptist, wrote the Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison. Some dissenters, like the Baptists, shared the reformed reverence for the absolute authority of scripture but interpreted the scriptural texts differently from their fellow Protestants. Others, like the Quakers, favored, even over the authority of the Bible, the "inner light" or voice of individual conscience, which they took to be the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals.

The Protestant dissenters were not England's only religious minorities. Despite crushing fines and the threat of imprisonment, a minority of Catholics under Elizabeth and James openly refused to give their allegiance to the new church, and others remained secret adherents to the old ways. John Donne was brought up in an ardently Catholic family, and several other writers converted to Catholicism as adults—Ben Jonson for a considerable part of his career, Elizabeth Carey and Richard Crashaw permanently, and at profound personal cost. In the eighteenth century, Catholics remained objects of suspicion as possible agents of sedition, especially after the "Glorious Revolution" in 1688 deposed the

Catholic James II in favor of the Protestant William and Mary. Anti-Catholic prejudice affected John Dryden, a Catholic convert, as well as the lifelong Catholic Alexander Pope. By contrast, the English colony of Ireland remained overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, the fervor of its religious commitment at least partly inspired by resistance to English occupation. Starting in the reign of Elizabeth, England shored up its own authority in Ireland by encouraging Protestant immigrants from Scotland to settle in the north of Ireland, producing a virulent religious divide the effects of which are still felt today.

A small community of Jews had moved from France to London after 1066, when the Norman William the Conqueror came to the English throne. Although despised and persecuted by many Christians, they were allowed to remain as moneylenders to the Crown, until the thirteenth century, when the king developed alternative sources of credit. At this point, in 1290, the Jews were expelled from England. In 1655 Oliver Cromwell permitted a few to return, and in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Jewish population slowly increased, mainly by immigration from Germany. In the mid-eighteenth century some prominent Jews had their children brought up as Christians so as to facilitate their full integration into English society: thus the nineteenth-century writer and politician Benjamin Disraeli, although he and his father were members of the Church of England, was widely considered a Jew insofar as his ancestry was Jewish.

In the late seventeenth century, as the Church of England reasserted itself, Catholics, Jews, and dissenting Protestants found themselves subject to significant legal restrictions. The Corporation Act, passed in 1661, and the Test Act, passed in 1673, excluded all who refused to take communion in the Church of England from voting, attending university, or working in government or in the professions. Members of religious minorities, as well as Church of England communicants, paid mandatory taxes in support of Church of England ministers and buildings. In 1689 the dissenters gained the right to worship in public, but Jews and Catholics were not permitted to do so.



During the eighteenth century, political, intellectual, and religious history remained closely intertwined. The Church of England came to accommodate a good deal of variety. "Low church" services resembled those of the dissenting Protestant churches, minimizing ritual and emphasizing the sermon; the "high church" retained more elaborate ritual elements, yet its prestige was under attack on several fronts. Many Enlightenment thinkers subjected the Bible to rational critique and found it wanting: the philosopher David Hume, for instance, argued that the "miracles" described therein were more probably lies or errors than real breaches of the laws of nature. Within the Church of England, the "broad church" Latitudinarians welcomed this rationalism, advocating theological openness and an emphasis on ethics rather than dogma. More radically, the Unitarian movement rejected the divinity of Christ while professing to accept his ethical teachings. Taking a different tack, the preacher John Wesley, founder of Methodism, responded to the rationalists' challenge with a newly fervent call to evangelism and personal discipline; his movement was particularly successful in Wales. Revolutions in America and France at the end of the century generated considerable millenarian excitement and fostered more new religious ideas, often in conjunction with a radical social agenda. Many important writers of the Romantic period were indebted to traditions of protestant dissent: Unitarian and rationalist protestant ideas influenced William Hazlitt, Anna Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge. William Blake created a highly idiosyncratic poetic mythology loosely indebted to radical strains of Christian mysticism. Others were even more heterodox: Lord Byron and Robert Burns, brought up as Scots Presbyterians, rebelled fiercely, and Percy Shelley's writing of an atheistic pamphlet resulted in his expulsion from Oxford.

Great Britain never erected an American-style "wall of separation" between church and state, but in practice religion and secular affairs grew more and more distinct during the nineteenth century. In consequence, members of religious minorities no longer seemed to pose a threat to the commonweal. A movement to repeal the Test Act failed in the 1790s, but a renewed effort resulted in the

extension of the franchise to dissenting Protestants in 1828 and to Catholics in 1829. The numbers of Roman Catholics in England were swelled by immigration from Ireland, but there were also some prominent English adherents. Among writers, the converts John Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins are especially important. The political participation and social integration of Jews presented a thornier challenge. Lionel de Rothschild, repeatedly elected to represent London in Parliament during the 1840s and 1850s, was not permitted to take his seat there because he refused to take his oath of office "on the true faith of a Christian"; finally, in 1858, the Jewish Disabilities Act allowed him to omit these words. Only in 1871, however, were Oxford and Cambridge opened to non-Anglicans.

Meanwhile geological discoveries and Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories increasingly cast doubt on the literal truth of the Creation story, and close philological analysis of the biblical text suggested that its origins were human rather than divine. By the end of the nineteenth century, many writers were bearing witness to a world in which Christianity no longer seemed fundamentally plausible. In his poetry and prose, Thomas Hardy depicts a world devoid of benevolent providence. Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is in part an elegy to lost spiritual assurance, as the "Sea of Faith" goes out like the tide: "But now I only hear / Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar / Retreating." For Arnold, literature must replace religion as a source of spiritual truth, and intimacy between individuals substitute for the lost communal solidarity of the universal church.

The work of many twentieth-century writers shows the influence of a religious upbringing or a religious conversion in adulthood. T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden embrace Anglicanism, William Butler Yeats spiritualism. James Joyce repudiates Irish Catholicism but remains obsessed with it. Yet religion, or lack of it, is a matter of individual choice and conscience, not social or legal mandate. Over the past several decades, church attendance has plummeted in Great Britain. Only about 46 percent of the population identified itself as "Christian" on the 2021 census. Meanwhile, immigration from former British colonies as well as other countries has swelled the ranks of

religions once uncommon in the British Isles—Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist—though the numbers of adherents remain small relative to the total population.

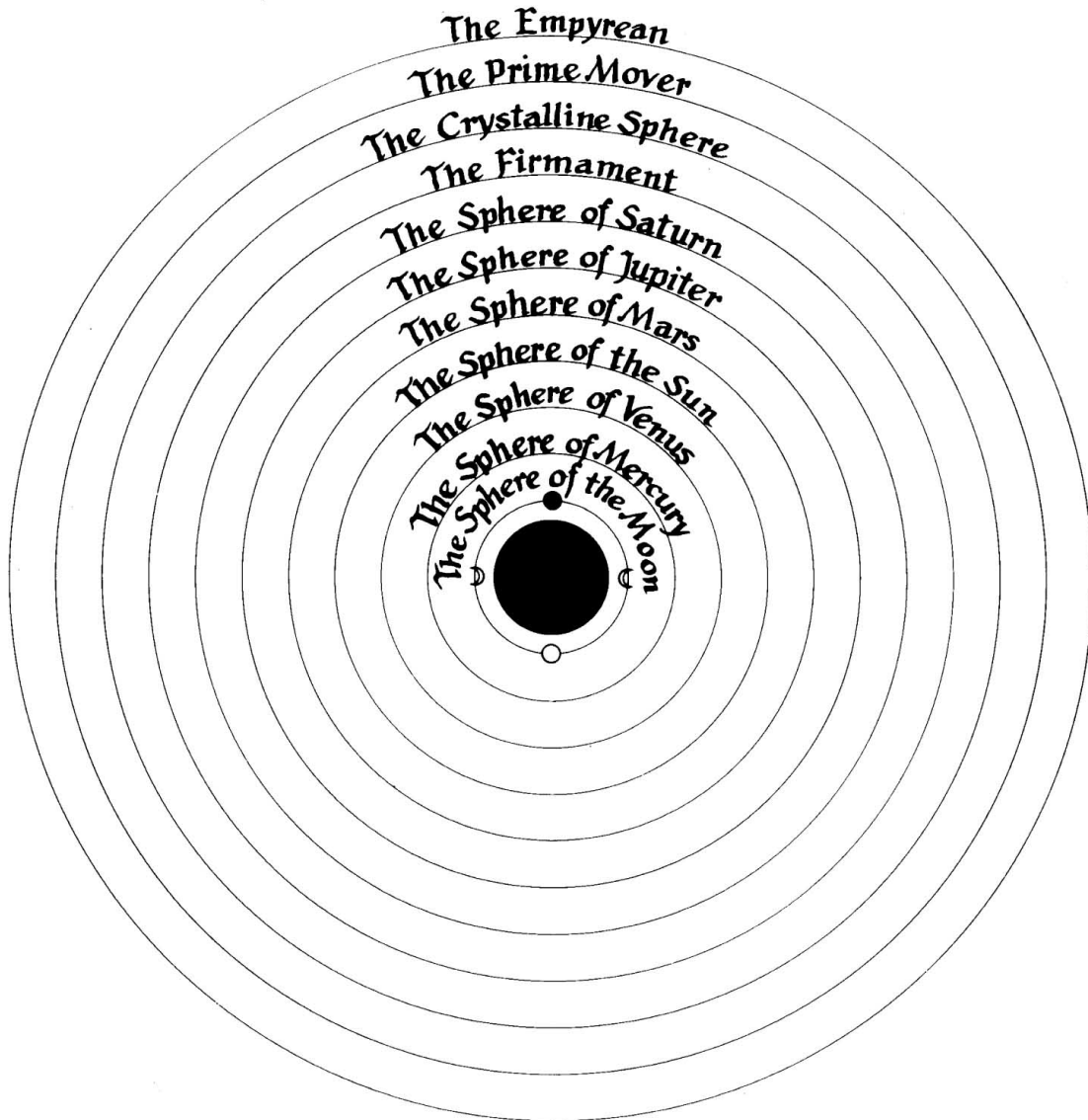
## The Universe According to Ptolemy

Ptolemy was a Roman astronomer of Greek descent, born in Egypt during the second century C.E.; for nearly fifteen hundred years after his death his account of the design of the universe was accepted as standard. During that time, the basic pattern underwent many detailed modifications and was fitted out with many astrological and pseudoscientific trappings. But in essence Ptolemy's followers portrayed the earth as the center of the universe, with the sun, planets, and fixed stars set in transparent spheres orbiting around it. In this scheme of things, as modified for Christian usage, Hell was usually placed under the earth's surface at the center of the cosmic globe, while Heaven, the abode of the blessed spirits, was in the outermost, uppermost circle, the empyrean. But in 1543 the Polish astronomer Copernicus proposed an alternative hypothesis—that the earth rotates around the sun, not vice versa; and despite theological opposition, observations with the new telescope and careful mathematical calculations insured ultimate acceptance of the new view.

The map of the Ptolemaic universe below is a simplified version of a diagram in Peter Apian's *Cosmography* (1584). In such a diagram, the Firmament is the sphere that contained the fixed stars; the Crystalline Sphere, which contained no heavenly bodies, is a late innovation, included to explain certain anomalies in the observed movement of the heavenly bodies; and the Prime Mover is the sphere that, itself put into motion by God, imparts rotation around the earth to all the other spheres.

Milton, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, used two universes. The Copernican universe, though he alludes to it, was too large, formless, and unfamiliar to be the setting for the war between Heaven and Hell in *Paradise Lost*. He therefore used the Ptolemaic

cosmos, but placed Heaven well outside this smaller earth-centered universe, Hell far beneath it, and assigned the vast middle space to Chaos.



# **Volume B: The Sixteenth Century and the Early Seventeenth Century**

# General Bibliography

This bibliography consists of a list of suggested general readings on English literature. Bibliographies for the authors and topical clusters in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* are available online at the NAEL student site.

## Histories of England and of English Literature

Even the most distinguished of the comprehensive general histories written in past generations have come to seem outmoded. Innovative research in social, cultural, and political history has made it difficult to write a single coherent account of England from the Middle Ages to the present, let alone to accommodate in a unified narrative the complex histories of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the other nations where writing in English has flourished. Readers who wish to explore the historical matrix out of which the works of literature collected in this anthology emerged are advised to consult the studies of particular periods listed in the appropriate sections of this bibliography. The multivolume *Oxford History of England* (1934–65) and *New Oxford History of England* (1992–2009) are useful, as are the three-volume *Peoples of the British Isles: A New History*, by Stanford E. Lehmberg, Samantha A. Meigs, and Thomas William Heyck (3rd ed., 1992); the nine-volume *Cambridge Cultural History of Britain*, ed. Boris Ford (1992); the three-volume *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950*, ed. F. M. L. Thompson (1990); and the multivolume *Penguin History of Britain*, gen. ed. David Cannadine (1996–). For Britain's imperial history, readers can consult the five-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (1998–99), as well as *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (2004). Also of interest is Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four*

*Continents* (2015). Given the cultural centrality of London, readers may find particular interest in *The London Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ben Weinreb et al. (3rd ed., 2008); Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (1994); and Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: "A Human Awful Wonder of God"* (2007) and *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (2001).

Similar observations may be made about literary history. In the light of such initiatives as women's studies, New Historicism, and postcolonialism, the range of authors deemed significant has expanded, along with the geographical and conceptual boundaries of literature in English. Attempts to capture in a unified account the great sweep of literature from *Beowulf* to the early twenty-first century have largely given way to studies of individual genres, carefully delimited time periods, and specific authors. Among the large-scale literary surveys, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. Dominic Head (3rd ed., 2006), is useful, as is the nine-volume *Penguin History of Literature* (1987–94) and the multivolume *Oxford History of Poetry in English* (2022–). *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Virginia Blain, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements (1990), is an important resource, and the editorial materials in the two-volume *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (3rd ed., 2007), constitute a concise history and set of biographies of women authors since the Middle Ages. *Annals of English Literature, 1475–1950* (2nd ed., 1961), lists important publications year by year, together with the significant literary events for each year. Seven volumes have been published in *The Oxford English Literary History*, gen. eds. Jonathan Bate and Colin Burrow (2002–): Laura Ashe, *1000–1350: Conquest and Transformation*; James Simpson, *1350–1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution*; Margaret J. M. Ezell, *1645–1714: The Later Seventeenth Century*; Philip Davis, *1830–1880: The Victorians*; Chris Baldick, *1830–1880: The Modern Movement (1910–1940)*; Randall Stevenson, *1960–2000: The Last of England?*; and Bruce King, *1948–2000: The Internationalization of English*.

*Literature*. See also *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (1999); *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare E. Lees (2013); *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (2002); *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, ed. John Richetti (2005); *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (2009); *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (2012); and *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (2004).

Helpful treatments and surveys of English meter, rhyme, and stanza forms are Paul Fussell Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (rev. ed., 1979); Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme: Device and Modernity* (1980); Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (1980); Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (1995); Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide* (1998); *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, ed. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland (2000); John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (3rd ed., 2001); *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, ed. Helen Vendler (3rd ed., 2010); *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (2014); and Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (2015).

On the development and functioning of the novel as a form, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1970; trans. 1980); *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (2000); *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (2 vols.; 2001–03, trans. 2006); McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (15th anniversary ed., 2002); *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (2012); *A Companion to the English Novel*, ed. Stephen Arata et al. (2015); and the ten volumes to date of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2012–). On women novelists and readers, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of*



*the Novel* (1987), and Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (1994).

On the history of playhouse design, see Richard Leacroft, *The Development of the English Playhouse: An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building in England from Medieval to Modern Times* (1988). For a survey of the plays that have appeared on these and other stages, see Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama*, rev. J. C. Trewin (6th ed., 1978); the eight-volume *The Revels History of Drama in English*, gen. eds. Clifford Leech and T. W. Craik (1975–83); Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum and Sylvia Wagonheim (3rd ed., 1989); and the three volumes of *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Jane Milling, Peter Thomson, Joseph Donohue, and Baz Kershaw (2004).

On some of the key intellectual currents that are at once reflected in and shaped by literature and contemporary literary criticism, Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic studies *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) and *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948) remain valuable, along with such works as Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900; trans. 1907; 3rd enl. ed., 2004); Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (4 vols., 1923–95; trans. 1953–96); Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (2 vols., 1939; trans. 1979–82); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (2 vols., 1949; trans. 1953, new trans. 2009); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; trans. 1957, new trans. 2008); Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957; new eds. 1997, 2016); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; 2nd ed., 1998); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958; trans. 1969, new ed. 1994); Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (1960; rev. ed., 1964; rev. and expanded as *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, 2003); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966; trans. 1983); M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*

(1971); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964; trans. 1965) and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; trans. 1970); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967; trans. 1976, 40th anniversary ed. 2016) and *Dissemination* (1972; trans. 1981); Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (1973); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973); Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973; trans. 1975); Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976; new ed., 2015); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979; trans. 1984); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979; 39th anniversary ed., 2009); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980; trans. 1987); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2 vols., 1980; trans. 1984–98); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1985; trans. 1987); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997); Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. Neil Hertz (1997); and N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999).

## Reference Works

The single most important tool for the study of literature in English is the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1884–1924; 2nd ed., 1989; 3rd ed. in process). The most current edition, updated quarterly, is available online to subscribers. The *OED* is written on historical principles: that is, it attempts not only to describe current word use but also to record the history and development of the language from its origins before the Norman Conquest to the present. It thus provides, for familiar as well as archaic and obscure words, the widest possible

range of meanings and uses, organized chronologically and illustrated with quotations. The *OED* can be searched as a conventional dictionary arranged a–z and also by subject, usage, region, origin, and timeline (the first appearance of a word). Resources available for early forms of English include the online Old English and Middle English dictionaries at Lexilogos ([https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english\\_old.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_old.htm) and [https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english\\_middle.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_middle.htm)); also valuable are the *Dictionary of Old English* (1986–) and the *Middle English Dictionary* (1952; digitized 2008). Beyond the *OED* there are many other valuable dictionaries, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary* (5th ed., 50th anniversary printing, 2018); *The Oxford Dictionary of Abbreviations* (1992); T. F. Hoad, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1993); Bas Aarts, Sylvia Chalker, and Edmund Weiner, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (2nd ed., 2014); Morton S. Freeman, *A New Dictionary of Eponyms* (1997); *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English* (1999); *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms*, ed. Judith Siefring (2nd ed., 2004); P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (3rd ed., 2014); Tom McArthur, *The Oxford Guide to World English* (2002); and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, ed. Jennifer Speake (4th ed., 2003). Other valuable reference works include *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, ed. David Crystal (3rd ed., 2018); *The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. Tom McArthur (1998); *Fowler's Concise Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, ed. Jeremy Butterfield (3rd ed., 2016); and the numerous guides to specialized vocabularies, slang, regional dialects, and the like.

There is a steady flow of new editions of most major and many minor writers in English, along with the publication of critical appraisals and scholarship. James L. Harner's *Literary Research Guide: An Annotated List of Reference Sources in English Literary Studies* (6th ed., 2014; available online at [www.mla.org/public](http://www.mla.org/public)) offers thorough, evaluative annotations of a wide range of sources. For the historical record of scholarship and critical discussion, *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. George

Watson (5 vols., 1969–77), and the third edition in process, *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. Joanne Shattock (1 vol. to date, 2000–), are useful. The *MLA International Bibliography* (also online) is a key resource for following critical discussion of literatures in English. Ranging from 1926 to the present, it includes journal articles, essays, chapters from collections, books, and dissertations, and covers folklore, linguistics, and film. The *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature* (ABELL), compiled by the Modern Humanities Research Association, lists monographs, periodical articles, critical editions of literary works, book reviews, and collections of essays published anywhere in the world; unpublished doctoral dissertations are covered for the period 1920–99 (available online to subscribers directly and as part of Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>).

For compact biographies of English authors, see the multivolume *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB), ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (2004); since 2004 the DNB has been extended online with updates (now monthly). Handy reference books of authors, works, and various literary terms and allusions include many volumes in the *Cambridge Companion* and *Oxford Companion* series: e.g., *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (2007); *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Dinah Birch (7th ed., 2009); and *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter Struck (2010). *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, editor-in-chief Roland Greene (4th ed., 2012), is available online to subscribers in Oxford Reference. Handbooks that define and illustrate literary concepts and terms include *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. J. A. Cuddon and M. A. R. Habib (5th ed., 2015); William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature* (12th ed., 2011); *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (2nd ed., 1995); and M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (11th ed., 2014). Also useful are Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (2nd ed., 1991); Arthur Quinn, *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase* (1982); the

*Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (1995); and George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (1994).

On Greek and Roman backgrounds, see *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*—vol. 1, *Greek Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and Bernard M. W. Knox (1985), and vol. 2, *Latin Literature*, ed. E. J. Kenney and W. V. Clausen (1982), both available to subscribers online; *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M. C. Howatson (3rd ed., 2011); Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (1987; trans. 1994); *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow (4th ed., 2012); Richard Rutherford, *Classical Literature: A Concise History* (2005); and Mark P. O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology* (11th ed., 2018). The Loeb Classical Library of Greek and Roman texts with facing-page English translations is now available online to subscribers at [www.loebclassics.com](http://www.loebclassics.com).

Digital resources in the humanities continue to grow rapidly. Among the many useful electronic resources for the study of English literature are enormous digital archives, available to subscribers: Early English Books Online (EEBO), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>; Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>; and Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), [www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online](http://www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online). There are also numerous free sites of variable quality. Many of the best of these are period- or author-specific and hence are listed in the period/author bibliographies on the NAEL website. Among the general sites, one of the most useful and wide-ranging is Voice of the Shuttle (<http://vos.ucsb.edu>), which includes links to Bartleby.com and Project Gutenberg.

## **Literary Criticism and Theory**

*The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* comprises nine volumes (1989–2013): *Classical Criticism*, ed. George A. Kennedy; *The Middle*

*Ages*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson; *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton; *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson; *Romanticism*, ed. Marshall Brown; *The Nineteenth Century, c. 1830–1914*, ed. M. A. R. Habib; *Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey; *From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. Raman Selden; and *Twentieth-Century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris. See also M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953); William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957); René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* (8 vols., 1955–92); Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (1980); J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature* (2002); and John Frow, *Character and Person* (2014). Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker have written *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (6th ed., 2017). Other useful resources include *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth, and Imre Szeman (2nd ed., 2005); *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, gen. ed. Vincent B. Leitch (3rd ed., 2018).

Modern approaches to English literature and literary theory were shaped by certain landmark works: William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; 3rd ed., 1953), *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), and *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951; 3rd ed., 1977); T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1932; 3rd ed., 1951) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957); F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936) and *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948); Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946; trans. 1953); Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950); William K. Wimsatt Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; 2nd ed., 1983); and W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and*

*the English Poet* (1970). René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3rd ed., 1963), is a useful introduction to the variety of scholarly and critical approaches to literature up to the time of its publication. Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed., 2011), discusses recurrent issues and debates. On the discipline of criticism, see John Guillory's *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (2022); Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) is a critical assessment of contemporary criticism.

Beginning in the late 1960s, interest in literary theory as a specific field markedly intensified. Certain forms of literary study had already been influenced by the work of the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson and the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky—and, still more, by conceptions that derived or claimed to derive from Marx and Engels—but the full impact of these theories was not felt until what became known as the “theory revolution” of the 1970s and '80s. For Marxist literary criticism, see Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1920; trans. 1971), *The Historical Novel* (1937; trans. 1962), and *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki, and Others* (trans. 1950); Walter Benjamin's essays from the 1920s and '30s, represented in *Illuminations* (1955; trans. 1968) and *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1975; trans. 1978); Mikhail Bakhtin's essays from the 1930s represented in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. 1981) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965; trans. 1968); *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1971); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (1977); Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (1979; 2nd ed., 2003); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981); and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983; anniversary ed., 2008) and *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990).

Structural linguistics and anthropology gave rise to a flowering of structuralist literary criticism; convenient introductions include Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (1974), and Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (new ed., 2002). Poststructuralist challenges to this approach are epitomized in such influential works as Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (1967; trans. 1978), and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971; 2nd ed., 1983). Poststructuralism is discussed in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982; 25th anniversary ed., 2007); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991); John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (1991); and *Beyond Structuralism: The Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading*, ed. Wendell V. Harris (1996). A figure who greatly influenced both structuralism and poststructuralism is Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies* (1957; trans. 1972, new trans. 2012) and *S/Z* (1970; trans. 1974). Among other influential contributions to literary theory are the psychoanalytic approach in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973; 2nd ed., 1997), and the reader-response approach in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980). For a retrospect on these decades, see Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (2003).

Influenced by these theoretical currents but not restricted to them, modern feminist literary criticism was fashioned by such works as Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (1975); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (1976; new ed., 1986); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977; expanded ed., 1999); and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Subsequent studies include Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*



(1977; trans. 1985); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987; new ed., 2006); Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (1987); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (3 vols., 1988–94); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; 2nd ed., 1999); and the critical views sampled in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (1985); *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Mary Eagleton (1986; 3rd ed., 2011); and *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (1991; rev. in 2009 as *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*); *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (1994); *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (2006); and *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2007).

Just as feminist critics used poststructuralist and psychoanalytic methods to place literature in conversation with gender theory, a new school emerged placing literature in conversation with critical race theory. Comprehensive introductions include *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (1995); and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Stephen M. Caliendo and Charlton D. McIlwain (2nd ed., 2021). For an important precursor in cultural studies, see Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978; 2nd ed., 2013). Seminal works include Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988; 25th anniversary ed., 2014); Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1991); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (1993; 25th anniversary ed., 2017); Gene Andrew Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature* (2011); Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (2017); and Saidiya V. Hartman,

*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019). Other important works include Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (2008; rpt. 2017); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016); and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018). Helpful anthologies and collections of essays have emerged in recent decades, such as *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris (1997), and also their *Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (2001); *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (1996; updated 2003); *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher and Michael P. Kramer (2003); *A Companion to African American Literature*, ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett (2010); *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (2011); *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*, ed. Suzanne Bost and Frances R. Aparicio (2013); *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (2014); *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (2015); and *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature, 1945–2010*, ed. Deirdre Osborne (2016).

Gay literature and queer studies are represented in collections including *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (1991); *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (1993); *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature: Readings from Western Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Byrne R. S. Fone (1998); *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (2014); and *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd (2015), and by such books as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,

*Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985; 30th anniversary ed., 2015) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990; updated ed., 2008); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (1989); Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (1995); Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (1998); David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (2002); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007); and Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis* (2016).

New Historicism is represented in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1990; new ed., 2007); *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (1993); *The New Historicism Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (1994); and Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (2000). The related social and historical dimension of texts is discussed in Jerome McGann, *Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983), and *Scholarly Editing: A Guide to Research*, ed. D. C. Greetham (1995). Characteristic of New Historicism is an expansion of the field of literary interpretation still further in cultural studies; for a broad sampling of the range of interests, see *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (1992); *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (1995); and *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (3rd ed., 2007).

This expansion of the field is similarly reflected in postcolonial studies: see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (cited above) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; trans. 1963, 60th anniversary ed. 2021); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993); *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (1990); *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2nd ed., 2006); and such influential books

as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989; 2nd ed., 2002); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995; 2nd ed., 2005); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000; new ed., 2008); and Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001; anniversary ed., 2016). Useful collections include *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (2 vols., 2011–12); *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. Ato Quayson (2016); and *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*, ed. Jahan Ramazani (2017).

In the wake of the theory revolution, critics have focused on a wide array of topics, which can be only briefly surveyed here. One current of work, focusing on the history of emotion, is represented in Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2005); *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010); and Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (2015). A somewhat related current, examining the special role of traumatic memory in literature, is exemplified in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (1995), and Dominic LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001; new ed., 2014). Work on the literary implications of cognitive science may be glimpsed in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (2010). Interest in quantitative approaches to literature was sparked by Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2005). For the field of digital humanities, see Moretti, *Distant Reading* (2013); *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, ed. Melissa Terras, Julianne Nyhan, and Edward Vanhoutte (2013); and *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (2016). For ecocriticism, or studies of literature and the environment, see *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996); *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge and

Neil Sammells (1998); Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (2000); Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005); Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011); *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (2014); and *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, ed. Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (2017). Related are the fields of animal studies and posthumanism, whose key works include Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991; trans. 1993); Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (2000); Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003) and *What Is Posthumanism?* (2009); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2006; trans. 2008); Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012); *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely (2012); and *Critical Animal Studies: Thinking the Unthinkable*, ed. John Sorenson (2014). The relationship between literature and law is central to such works as *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader*, ed. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailloux (1988); *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, ed. Peter Brooks and Paul Gewirtz (1996); *Literature and Legal Problem Solving: Law and Literature as Ethical Discourse*, ed. Paul J. Heald (1998); and *New Directions in Law and Literature*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Bernadette Meyler (2017). Ethical questions in literature have been usefully explored by, among others, Geoffrey Galt Harpham in *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (1992) and Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). Finally, some approaches to literature, such as formalism and literary biography, that seemed superseded in the theoretical ferment of the late twentieth century have had a resurgence. A renewed interest in form is evident in Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002); *Reading for Form*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (2006); and Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy,*

*Network* (2015). Interest in the history of the book was spearheaded by D. F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1986), Jerome J. McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991), and Roger Chartier's *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1992; trans. 1994). See also *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (1996); *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (7 vols., 1999–2019); *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (2nd ed., 2006); and *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Leslie Howsam (2015). For studies in new media and digital or electronic literature, see N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008); Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (2016); and Jessica Pressman's *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (2020).

Anthologies representing a range of recent approaches include *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge with Nigel Wood (2nd ed., 2000); *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (4th ed., 1998); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (cited above).

# Literary Terminology\*

Using simple technical terms can sharpen our understanding and streamline our discussion of literary works. Some terms, such as the ones in section A, below, help us address the internal style, structure, form, and kind of works. Other terms, such as those in section B, provide insight into the material forms in which literary works have been produced.

In analyzing what they called “rhetoric,” ancient Greek and Roman writers determined the elements of what we call “style” and “structure.” Most of our literary terms are derived, via medieval and Renaissance intermediaries, from the Greek and Latin sources. In the definitions that follow, the etymology, or root, of the word is given when it helps illuminate the word’s current usage.

Many of the examples are drawn from texts in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.

Words **boldfaced** within definitions are themselves defined in this appendix. Some terms are defined within definitions; such words are *italicized*.

## A. Terms of Style, Structure, Form, and Kind

**accent** (synonym “stress”): a term of **rhythm**. The special force devoted to the voicing of one syllable in a word over others. In the noun “accent,” for example, the accent, or stress, is on the first syllable.

**act**: the major subdivision of a play, usually divided into **scenes**.

**aesthetics** (from Greek, “to feel, apprehend by the senses”): the philosophy of artistic meaning as a distinct mode of apprehending

untranslatable truth, defined as an alternative to rational enquiry, which is purely abstract. Developed in the late eighteenth century by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant especially.

**Alexandrine:** a term of **meter**. In French verse a line of twelve syllables, and, by analogy, in English verse a line of six stresses. See **hexameter**.

**allegory** (Greek "saying otherwise"): saying one thing (the "vehicle" of the allegory) and meaning another (the allegory's "tenor"). Allegories may be momentary aspects of a work, as in **metaphor** ("John is a lion"), or, through extended metaphor, may constitute the basis of narrative, as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: this second meaning is the dominant one. See also **symbol** and **type**. Allegory is one of the most significant **figures of thought**.

**alliteration** (from Latin "litera," alphabetic letter): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of an initial consonant sound or consonant cluster in consecutive or closely positioned words. This pattern is often an inseparable part of the meter in Germanic languages, where the tonic, or accented **syllable**, is usually the first syllable. Thus all Old English poetry and some varieties of Middle English poetry use alliteration as part of their basic metrical practice. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 1: "Once the siege and assault of Troy had ceased" (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)). Otherwise used for local effects; Stevie Smith, "Pretty," lines 4–5: "And in the pretty pool the pike stalks / He stalks his prey . . ." (see vol. F, [p. 589](#)).

**allusion:** Literary allusion is a passing but illuminating reference within a literary text to another, well-known text (often biblical or **classical**). Topical allusions are also, of course, common in certain modes, especially **satire**.

**anagnorisis** (Greek "recognition"): the moment of **protagonist's** recognition in a narrative, which is also often the moment of moral understanding.



**anapest:** a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two unstressed (uu) syllables followed by one stressed (/). Thus, for example, "Illinois."

**anaphora** (Greek "carrying back"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of words or groups of words at the beginning of consecutive sentences, clauses, or phrases. Blake, "London," lines 5–8: "In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban . . ." (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)); Louise Bennett, "Jamaica Oman," lines 17–20: "Some backa man a push, some side-a / Man a hole him han, / Some a lick sense eena him head, / Some a guide him pon him plan!" (see vol. F, [p. 724](#)).

**animal fable:** a **genre**. A short narrative of speaking animals, followed by moralizing comment, written in a low style and gathered into a collection. Robert Henryson, "The Cock and the Jasper" (see vol. A, [p. 679](#)).

**antithesis** (Greek "placing against"): a **figure of thought**. The juxtaposition of opposed terms in clauses or sentences that are next to or near each other. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.777–80: "They but now who seemed / In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons / Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room / Throng numberless" (see vol. B, [p. 1448](#)).

**apostrophe** (from Greek "turning away"): a **figure of thought**. An address, often to an absent person, a force, or a quality. For example, a poet makes an apostrophe to a Muse when invoking her for inspiration.

**apposition:** a term of **syntax**. The repetition of elements serving an identical grammatical function in one sentence. The effect of this repetition is to arrest the flow of the sentence, but in doing so to add extra semantic nuance to repeated elements. This is an especially important feature of Old English poetic style. See, for example, Caedmon's *Hymn* (vol. A, [p. 31](#)), where the phrases

“heaven-kingdom’s Guardian,” “the Measurer’s might,” “his mind-plans,” and “the work of the Glory-Father” each serve an identical syntactic function as the direct objects of “praise.”

**assonance** (Latin “sounding to”): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical or near identical stressed vowel sounds in words whose final consonants differ, producing half-rhyme. Tennyson, “The Lady of Shalott,” line 100: “His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed” (see vol. E, [p. 210](#)).

**aubade** (originally from Spanish “alba,” dawn): a **genre**. A lover’s dawn song or lyric bewailing the arrival of the day and the necessary separation of the lovers; Donne, “The Sun Rising” (see vol. B, [p. 888](#)). Larkin recasts the genre in “Aubade” (see vol. F, [p. 795](#)).

**autobiography** (Greek “self-life writing”): a **genre**. A narrative of a life written by the subject; Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)). There are subgenres, such as the spiritual autobiography, narrating the author’s path to conversion and subsequent spiritual trials, as in Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding*.

**ballad stanza**: a **verse form**. Usually a **quatrain** in alternating **iambic tetrameter** and **iambic trimeter** lines, rhyming abcb. See “Sir Patrick Spens” (vol. D, [p. 38](#)); Louise Bennett’s poems (vol. F, [pp. 719–24](#)); Eliot, “Sweeney among the Nightingales” (vol. F, [p. 501](#)); Larkin, “This Be The Verse” (vol. F, [p. 795](#)).

**ballade**: a **verse form**. A form consisting usually of three stanzas followed by a four-line envoi (French, “send off”). The last line of the first stanza establishes a **refrain**, which is repeated, or subtly varied, as the last line of each stanza. The form was derived from French medieval poetry; English poets, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries especially, used it with varying stanza forms. Chaucer, “The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse” (see vol. A, [p. 575](#)).

**bathos** (Greek “depth”): a **figure of thought**. A sudden and sometimes ridiculous descent of tone; Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* 3.157–58: “Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast, / When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last” (see vol. C, [p. 549](#)).

**beast epic**: a **genre**. A continuous, unmoralized narrative, in prose or verse, relating the victories of the wholly unscrupulous but brilliant strategist Reynard the Fox over all adversaries. Chaucer arouses, only to deflate, expectations of the genre in *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 556](#)).

**biography** (Greek “life-writing”): a **genre**. A life as the subject of an extended narrative.

**blank verse**: a **verse form**. Unrhymed **iambic pentameter** lines. Blank verse has no stanzas, but is broken up into uneven units (verse paragraphs) determined by sense rather than form. First devised in English by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in his translation of two books of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, this very flexible verse type became the standard form for dramatic poetry in the seventeenth century, as in most of Shakespeare’s plays. Milton and Wordsworth, among many others, also used it to create an English equivalent to **classical epic**.

**blazon**: strictly, a heraldic shield; in rhetorical usage, a **topos** whereby the individual elements of a beloved’s face and body are singled out for **hyperbolic** admiration. Spenser, *Epithalamion*, lines 167–84 (see vol. B, [p. 459](#)). For an inversion of the **topos**, see Shakespeare, Sonnet 130 (vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**burlesque** (French and Italian “mocking”): a work that adopts the **conventions** of a genre with the aim less of comically mocking the genre than of satirically mocking the society so represented (see **satire**). Thus Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)) does not mock **classical epic** so much as contemporary mores.

**caesura** (Latin "cut") (plural "caesurae"): a term of **meter**. A pause or breathing space within a line of verse, generally occurring between syntactic units; Louise Bennett, "Colonization in Reverse," lines 5–8: "By de hundred, by de tousan, / From country an from town, / By de ship-load, by de plane-load, / Jamaica is Englan boun" (see vol. F, [p. 722](#)), where the caesurae occur in lines 5 and 7.

**canon** (Greek "rule"): the group of texts regarded as worthy of special respect or attention by a given institution. Also, the group of texts regarded as definitely having been written by a certain author.

**catastrophe** (Greek "overturning"): the decisive turn in **tragedy** by which the plot is resolved and, usually, the **protagonist** dies.

**catharsis** (Greek "cleansing"): According to Aristotle, the effect of **tragedy** on its audience, through their experience of pity and terror, was a kind of spiritual cleansing, or catharsis.

**character** (Greek "stamp, impression"): a person, personified animal, or other figure represented in a literary work, especially in narrative and drama. The more a character seems to generate the action of a narrative, and the less he or she seems merely to serve a preordained narrative pattern, the "fuller," or more "rounded," a character is said to be. A "stock" character, common particularly in many comic genres, will perform a predictable function in different works of a given genre.

**chiasmus** (Greek "crosswise"): a **figure of speech**. The inversion of an already established sequence. This can involve verbal echoes: Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard," line 104, "The crime was common, common be the pain" (see vol. C, [p. 560](#)); or it can be purely a matter of syntactic inversion: Pope, *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, line 8: "They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide" (see vol. C, [p. 575](#)).

**classical, classicism, classic**: Each term can be widely applied, but in English literary discourse, "classical" primarily describes the

works of either Greek or Roman antiquity. "Classicism" denotes the practice of art forms inspired by classical antiquity, in particular the observance of rhetorical norms of **decorum** and balance, as opposed to following the dictates of untutored inspiration, as in Romanticism. "Classic" denotes an especially famous work within a given **canon**.

**climax** (Greek "ladder"): a moment of great intensity and structural change, especially in drama. Also a **figure of speech** whereby a sequence of verbally linked clauses is made, in which each successive clause is of greater consequence than its predecessor. Bacon, *Of Studies*: "Studies serve for pastimes, for ornaments, and for abilities. Their chief use for pastimes is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in judgement" (see vol. B, [pp. 1167–68](#)).

**comedy**: a **genre**. A term primarily applied to drama, and derived from ancient drama, in opposition to **tragedy**. Comedy deals with humorously confusing, sometimes ridiculous situations in which the ending is, nevertheless, happy. A comedy often ends in one or more marriages.

**comic mode**: Many genres (for example, **romance**, **fabliau**, **comedy**) involve a happy ending in which justice is done, the ravages of time are arrested, and that which is lost is found. Such genres participate in a comic mode.

**connotation**: To understand connotation, we need to understand **denotation**. While many words can denote the same concept—that is, have the same basic meaning—those words can evoke different associations, or connotations. Contrast, for example, the clinical-sounding term "depression" and the more colorful, musical, even poetic phrase "the blues."

**consonance** (Latin "sounding with"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of final consonants in words or stressed syllables whose

vowel sounds are different. Herbert, "Easter," line 13: "Consort, both heart and lute . . ." (see vol. B, [p. 1183](#)).

**convention:** a repeatedly recurring feature (in either form or content) of works, occurring in combination with other recurring formal features, which constitutes a convention of a particular genre.

**couplet:** a **verse form**. In English verse two consecutive, rhyming lines usually containing the same number of stresses. Chaucer first introduced the **iambic pentameter** couplet into English (*Canterbury Tales*); the form was later used in many types of writing, including drama; imitations and translations of **classical epic** (thus *heroic couplet*); essays; and **satire** (see Dryden and Pope). The *distich* (Greek "two lines") is a couplet usually making complete sense; Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, lines 5–6: "Read it fair queen, though it defective be, / Your excellence can grace both it and me" (see vol. B, [p. 925](#)).

**dactyl** (Greek "finger," because of the finger's three joints): a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of one stressed followed by two unstressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Oregon."

**decorum** (Latin "that which is fitting"): a rhetorical principle whereby each formal aspect of a work should be in keeping with its subject matter and/or audience.

**deixis** (Greek "pointing"): relevant to **point of view**. Every work has, implicitly or explicitly, a "here" and a "now" from which it is narrated. Words that refer to or imply this point from which the voice of the work is projected (such as "here," "there," "this," "that," "now," "then") are examples of deixis, or "deictics." This technique is especially important in drama, where it is used to create a sense of the events happening as the spectator witnesses them.

**denotation:** A word has a basic, "prosaic" (factual) meaning prior to the associations it connotes (see **connotation**). The word

“steed,” for example, might call to mind a horse fitted with battle gear, to be ridden by a warrior, but its denotation is simply “horse.”

**denouement** (French “unknotting”): the point at which a narrative can be resolved and so ended.

**dialogue** (Greek “conversation”): a **genre**. Dialogue is a feature of many genres, especially in both the **novel** and drama. As a genre itself, dialogue is used in philosophical traditions especially (most famously in Plato’s *Dialogues*), as the representation of a conversation in which a philosophical question is pursued among various speakers.

**diction**, or “**lexis**” (from, respectively, Latin *dictio* and Greek *lexis*, each meaning “word”): the actual words used in any utterance—speech, writing, and, for our purposes here, literary works. The choice of words contributes significantly to the style of a given work.

**didactic mode** (Greek “teaching mode”): **Genres** in a didactic mode are designed to instruct or teach, sometimes explicitly (for example, sermons, philosophical **discourses**, **georgic**), and sometimes through the medium of fiction (for example, **animal fable**, **parable**).

**diegesis** (Greek for “narration”): a term that simply means “narration,” but is used in literary criticism to distinguish one kind of story from another. In a *mimetic* story, the events are played out before us (see **mimesis**), whereas in diegesis someone recounts the story to us. Drama is for the most part *mimetic*, whereas the novel is for the most part diegetic. In novels the narrator is not, usually, part of the action of the narrative; s/he is therefore extradiegetic.

**dimeter** (Greek “two measure”): a term of **meter**. A two-stress line, rarely used as the meter of whole poems, though used with great frequency in single poems by Skelton, for example, “The Tunning of Elinour Rumming” (see vol. B, [p. 41](#)). Otherwise used for



single lines, as in Herbert, "Discipline," line 3: "O my God" (see vol. B, [p. 1197](#)).

**discourse** (Latin "running to and fro"): broadly, any nonfictional speech or writing; as a more specific genre, a philosophical meditation on a set theme.

**dramatic irony**: a feature of narrative and drama, whereby the audience knows that the outcome of an action will be the opposite of that intended by a **character**.

**dramatic monologue** (Greek "single speaking"): a **genre**. A poem in which the voice of a historical or fictional **character** speaks, unmediated by any narrator, to an implied though silent audience. See Tennyson, "Ulysses" (vol. E, [p. 217](#)); Browning, "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" (vol. E, [p. 416](#)); Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (vol. F, [p. 498](#)); Carol Ann Duffy, "Medusa" and "Mrs Lazarus" (vol. F, [pp. 1158–60](#)).

**ecphrasis** (Greek "speaking out"): a **topos** whereby a work of visual art is represented in a literary work. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)).

**elegy**: a **genre**. In **classical** literature elegy was a form written in elegiac **couplets** (a **hexameter** followed by a **pentameter**) devoted to many possible topics. In Ovidian elegy a lover meditates on the trials of erotic desire (for example, Ovid's *Amores*). The **sonnet** sequences of both Sidney and Shakespeare exploit this genre, and, while it was still practiced in classical tradition by Donne ("On His Mistress" [see vol. B, [p. 903](#)]), by the later seventeenth century the term came to denote the poetry of loss, especially through the death of a loved person. See Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (vol. E, [p. 231](#)); Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F, [p. 970](#)).

**emblem** (Greek "an insertion"): a **figure of thought**. A picture allegorically expressing a moral, or a verbal picture open to such



interpretation.

**end-stopping:** the placement of a complete syntactic unit within a complete poetic line, fulfilling the metrical pattern; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," line 42: "Earth, receive an honoured guest" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)). Compare **enjambment**.

**enjambment** (French "striding," encroaching): The opposite of **end-stopping**, enjambment occurs when the syntactic unit does not end with the end of the poetic line and the fulfillment of the metrical pattern. When the sense of the line overflows its meter and, therefore, the line break, we have enjambment; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," lines 44–45: "Let the Irish vessel lie / Emptied of its poetry" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)).

**epic** (synonym, *heroic poetry*): a **genre**. An extended narrative poem celebrating martial heroes, invoking divine inspiration, beginning in medias res (see **order**), written in a high style (including the deployment of **epic similes**; on high style, see **register**), and divided into long narrative sequences. Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* were the prime models for English writers of epic verse. Thus Milton, *Paradise Lost* (see vol. B, [p. 1427](#)); Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)); and Walcott, *Omeros* (see vol. F, [p. 808](#)). With its precise repertoire of stylistic resources, epic lent itself easily to **parodic** and **burlesque** forms, known as **mock epic**; thus Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)).

**epigram:** a **genre**. A short, pithy poem wittily expressed, often with wounding intent. See Jonson, *Epigrams* (see vol. B, [p. 1049](#)).

**epigraph** (Greek "inscription"): a **genre**. Any formal statement inscribed on stone; also the brief formulation on a book's title page, or a quotation at the beginning of a poem, introducing the work's themes in the most compressed form possible.

**epistle** (Latin "letter"): a **genre**. The letter can be shaped as a literary form, involving an intimate address often between equals.

The *Epistles* of Horace provided a model for English writers from the sixteenth century. Thus Wyatt, "Mine Own John Poins" (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)), or Leapor, "An Epistle to a Lady" (vol. C, [p. 771](#)). Letters can be shaped to form the matter of an extended fiction, as the eighteenth-century epistolary **novel** (for example, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*).

**epitaph:** a **genre**. A pithy formulation to be inscribed on a funeral monument. Thus Raleigh, "The Author's Epitaph, Made by Himself" (see vol. B, [p. 479](#)).

**epithalamion** (Greek "concerning the bridal chamber"): a **genre**. A wedding poem, celebrating the marriage and wishing the couple good fortune. Thus Spenser, *Epithalamion* (see vol. B, [p. 455](#)).

**epyllion** (plural "epyllia") (Greek: "little epic"): a **genre**. A relatively short poem in the meter of epic poetry. See, for example, Marlowe, *Hero and Leander* (vol. B, [p. 562](#)).

**essay** (French "trial, attempt"): a **genre**. An informal philosophical meditation, usually in prose and sometimes in verse. The journalistic periodical essay was developed in the early eighteenth century. Thus Addison and Steele, periodical essays (see vol. C, [p. 281](#)); Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (see vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

**euphemism** (Greek "sweet saying"): a **figure of thought**. The figure by which something distasteful is described in alternative, less repugnant terms (for example, "he passed away").

**exegesis** (Greek "leading out"): interpretation, traditionally of the biblical text, but, by transference, of any text.

**exemplum** (Latin "example"): an example inserted into a usually nonfictional writing (for example, sermon or **essay**) to give extra force to an abstract thesis.

**fabliau** (French “little story,” plural *fabliaux*): a **genre**. A short, funny, often bawdy narrative in low style (see **register**) imitated and developed from French models, most subtly by Chaucer; see *The Miller’s Prologue and Tale* (vol. A, [p. 494](#)).

**farce** (French “stuffing”): a **genre**. A play designed to provoke laughter through the often humiliating antics of stock **characters**. Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (see vol. C, [p. 221](#)) draws on this tradition.

**figures of speech**: Literary language often employs patterns perceptible to the eye and/or to the ear. Such patterns are called “figures of speech”; in classical rhetoric they were called “schemes” (from Greek *schema*, meaning “form, figure”).

**figures of thought**: Language can also be patterned conceptually, even outside the rules that normally govern it. Literary language in particular exploits this licensed linguistic irregularity. Synonyms for figures of thought are “trope” (Greek “twisting,” referring to the irregularity of use) and “conceit” (Latin “concept,” referring to the fact that these figures are perceptible only to the mind). Be careful not to confuse **trope** with **topos** (a common error).

**first-person narration**: relevant to **point of view**, a narrative in which the voice narrating refers to itself with forms of the first-person pronoun (“I,” “me,” “my,” etc., or possibly “we,” “us,” “our”), and in which the narrative is determined by the limitations of that voice. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*.

**frame narrative**: Some narratives, particularly collections of narratives, involve a frame narrative that explains the genesis of, and/or gives a perspective on, the main narrative or narratives to follow. Thus Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*; or Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

**free indirect style**: relevant to **point of view**, a narratorial voice that manages, without explicit reference, to imply, and often

implicitly to comment on, the voice of a **character** in the narrative itself. Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," where the voice, although strictly that of the adult narrator, manages to convey the child's manner of perception: "—I begin: the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black background—my mother's dress."

**genre and mode:** The **style**, structure, and, often, length of a work, when coupled with a certain subject matter, raise expectations that a literary work conforms to a certain **genre** (French "kind"). Good writers might upset these expectations, but they remain aware of the expectations and thwart them purposefully. Works in different genres may nevertheless participate in the same **mode**, a broader category designating the fundamental perspectives governing various genres of writing. For mode, see **tragic, comic, satiric, and didactic modes**. Genres are fluid, sometimes very fluid (for example, the **novel**); the word "usually" should be added to almost every account of the characteristics of a given genre!

**georgic** (Greek "farming"): a **genre**. Virgil's *Georgics* treat agricultural and occasionally scientific subjects, giving instructions on the proper management of farms. Unlike **pastoral**, which treats the countryside as a place of recreational idleness among shepherds, the georgic treats it as a place of productive labor.

**hermeneutics** (from the Greek god Hermes, messenger between the gods and humankind): the science of interpretation, first formulated as such by the German philosophical theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century.

**heroic poetry:** see **epic**.

**hexameter** (Greek "six measure"): a term of **meter**. The hexameter line (a six-stress line) is the meter of **classical** Latin **epic**; while not imitated in that form for epic verse in English, some instances of the hexameter exist. See, for example, the last line of a

Spenserian stanza, *Faerie Queene* 1.1.2: "O help thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong" (vol. B, [p. 269](#)), or Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," line 1: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree" (vol. F, [p. 221](#)).

**homily** (Greek "discourse"): a **genre**. A sermon, to be preached in church; *Book of Homilies* (see vol. B, [p. 164](#)). Writers of literary fiction sometimes exploit the homily, or sermon, as in Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 540](#)).

**homophone** (Greek "same sound"): a **figure of speech**. A word that sounds identical to another word but has a different meaning ("bear" / "bare").

**hyperbaton** (Greek "overstepping"): a term of **syntax**. The rearrangement, or inversion, of the expected word order in a sentence or clause. Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," line 38: "If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise" (vol. C, [p. 899](#)). Poets can suspend the expected syntax over many lines, as in the first sentences of the *Canterbury Tales* (vol. A, [p. 474](#)) and of *Paradise Lost* (vol. B, [p. 1430](#)).

**hyperbole** (Greek "throwing over"): a **figure of thought**. Overstatement, exaggeration; Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," lines 11–12: "My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires, and more slow" (see vol. B, [p. 1273](#)); Auden, "As I Walked Out One Evening," lines 9–12: "I'll love you, dear, I'll love you / Till China and Africa meet / And the river jumps over the mountain / And the salmon sing in the street" (see vol. F, [p. 675](#)).

**hypermetrical** (adj.; Greek "over measured"): a term of **meter**; the word describes a breaking of the expected metrical pattern by at least one extra syllable.

**hypotaxis**, or **subordination** (respectively Greek and Latin "ordering under"): a term of **syntax**. The subordination, by the use of subordinate clauses, of different elements of a sentence to a

single main verb. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9.513–15: “As when a ship by skillful steersman wrought / Nigh river’s mouth or foreland, where the wind / Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail; So varied he” (vol. B, [p. 1588](#)). The contrary principle to **parataxis**.

**iamb**: a term of **rhythm**. The basic foot of English verse; two syllables following the rhythmic pattern of unstressed followed by stressed and producing a rising effect. Thus, for example, “Vermont.”

**imitation**: the practice whereby writers strive ideally to reproduce and yet renew the **conventions** of an older form, often derived from **classical** civilization. Such a practice will be praised in periods of classicism (for example, the eighteenth century) and repudiated in periods dominated by a model of inspiration (for example, Romanticism).

**irony** (Greek “dissimulation”): a **figure of thought**. In broad usage, irony designates the result of inconsistency between a statement and a context that undermines the statement. “It’s a beautiful day” is unironic if it’s a beautiful day; if, however, the weather is terrible, then the inconsistency between statement and context is ironic. The effect is often amusing; the need to be ironic is sometimes produced by censorship of one kind or another. Strictly, irony is a subset of allegory: whereas allegory says one thing and means another, irony says one thing and means its opposite. For an extended example of irony, see Swift’s “Modest Proposal” (vol. C, [p. 511](#)). See also **dramatic irony**.

**journal** (French “daily”): a **genre**. A diary, or daily record of ephemeral experience, whose perspectives are concentrated on, and limited by, the experiences of single days. Thus Pepys, *Diary* (see vol. C, [p. 74](#)).

**lai**: a **genre**. A short narrative, often characterized by images of great intensity; a French term, and a form practiced by Marie de France (see vol. A, [p. 159](#)).

**legend** (Latin “requiring to be read”): a **genre**. A narrative of a celebrated, possibly historical, but mortal **protagonist**. To be distinguished from **myth**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

**lexical set**: Words that habitually recur together (for example, January, February, March, etc.; or red, white, and blue) form a lexical set.

**litotes** (from Greek “smooth”): a **figure of thought**. Strictly, understatement by denying the contrary; More, *Utopia*: “differences of no slight import” (see vol. B, [p. 49](#)). More loosely, understatement; Stevie Smith, “Sunt Leones,” lines 11–12: “And if the Christians felt a little blue— / Well people being eaten often do” (see vol. F, [p. 585](#)).

**lullaby**: a **genre**. A bedtime, sleep-inducing song for children, in simple and regular meter. Adapted by Auden, “Lullaby” (see vol. F, [p. 671](#)).

**lyric** (from Greek “lyre”): Initially meaning a song, “lyric” refers to a short poetic form, without restriction of meter, in which the expression of personal emotion, often by a voice in the first person, is given primacy over narrative sequence. Thus “The Wife’s Lament” (see vol. A, [p. 126](#)); Yeats, “The Wild Swans at Coole” (see vol. F, [p. 229](#)).

**masque**: a **genre**. Costly entertainments of the Stuart court, involving dance, song, speech, and elaborate stage effects, in which courtiers themselves participated.

**metaphor** (Greek “carrying across,” etymologically parallel to Latin “translation”): One of the most significant **figures of thought**, metaphor designates identification or implicit identification of one thing with another with which it is not literally identifiable. Blake, “London,” lines 11–12: “And the hapless Soldier’s sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls” (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)).

**meter:** Verse (from Latin *versus*, turned) is distinguished from prose (from Latin *prorsus*, "straightforward") as a more compressed form of expression, shaped by metrical norms. **Meter** (Greek "measure") refers to the regularly recurring sound pattern of verse lines. The means of producing sound patterns across lines differ in different poetic traditions. Verse may be **quantitative**, or determined by the quantities of syllables (set patterns of long and short syllables), as in Latin and Greek poetry. It may be **syllabic**, determined by fixed numbers of syllables in the line, as in the verse of Romance languages (for example, French and Italian). It may be **accentual**, determined by the number of accents, or stresses in the line, with variable numbers of syllables, as in Old English and some varieties of Middle English alliterative verse. Or it may be **accentual-syllabic**, determined by the numbers of accents, but possessing a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, so as to produce regular numbers of syllables per line. Since Chaucer, English verse has worked primarily within the many possibilities of accentual-syllabic meter. The unit of meter is the **foot**. In English verse the number of feet per line corresponds to the number of accents in a line. For the types and examples of different meters, see **monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, and hexameter**. In the definitions below, "u" designates one unstressed syllable, and "/" one stressed syllable.

**metonymy** (Greek "change of name"): one of the most significant **figures of thought**. Using a word to **denote** another concept or other concepts, by virtue of habitual association. Thus "The Press," designating printed news media. Fictional names often work by associations of this kind. Closely related to **synecdoche**.

**mimesis** (Greek for "imitation"): A central function of literature and drama has been to provide a plausible imitation of the reality of the world beyond the literary work; mimesis is the representation and imitation of what is taken to be reality.



***mise-en-abyme*** (French for “cast into the abyss”): Some works of art represent themselves in themselves; if they do so effectively, the represented artifact also represents itself, and so ad infinitum. The effect achieved is called “*mise-en-abyme*.” Hoccleve’s *Complaint*, for example, represents a depressed man reading about a depressed man. This sequence threatens to become a *mise-en-abyme*.

**monometer** (Greek “one measure”): a term of **meter**. An entire line with just one stress; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 15, “most (u) grand (/)” (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)).

**myth**: a **genre**. The narrative of **protagonists** with, or subject to, superhuman powers. A myth expresses some profound foundational truth, often by accounting for the origin of natural phenomena. To be distinguished from **legend**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

**novel**: an extremely flexible **genre** in both form and subject matter. Usually in prose, giving high priority to narration of events, with a certain expectation of length, novels are preponderantly rooted in a specific, and often complex, social world; sensitive to the realities of material life; and often focused on one **character** or a small circle of central characters. By contrast with chivalric **romance** (the main European narrative genre prior to the novel), novels tend to eschew the marvelous in favor of a recognizable social world and credible action. The novel’s openness allows it to participate in all modes, and to be co-opted for a huge variety of subgenres. In English literature the novel dates from the late seventeenth century and has been astonishingly successful in appealing to a huge readership, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The English and Irish tradition of the novel includes, for example, Fielding, Austen, the Brontë sisters, Dickens, George Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, Lawrence, and Joyce, to name but a few very great exponents of the genre.

**novella:** a **genre**. A short **novel**, often characterized by imagistic intensity. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (see vol. F, [p. 70](#)).

**occupatio** (Latin “taking possession”): a **figure of thought**. Denying that one will discuss a subject while actually discussing it; also known as “praeteritio” (Latin “passing by”). See Chaucer, *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, lines 414–31 (see vol. A, [p. 565](#)).

**ode** (Greek “song”): a **genre**. A **lyric** poem in elevated, or high style (see **register**), often addressed to a natural force, a person, or an abstract quality. The Pindaric ode in English is made up of **stanzas** of unequal length, while the Horatian ode has stanzas of equal length. For examples of both types, see, respectively, Wordsworth, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (vol. D, [p. 381](#)); and Marvell, “An Horatian Ode” (vol. B, [p. 1282](#)), or Keats, “Ode on Melancholy” (vol. D, [p. 973](#)). For a fuller discussion, see the headnote to Jonson’s “Ode on Cary and Morison” (vol. B, [p. 1058](#)).

**omniscient narrator** (Latin “all-knowing narrator”): relevant to **point of view**. A narrator who, in the fiction of the narrative, has complete access to both the deeds and the thoughts of all **characters** in the narrative. Thus Thomas Hardy, “On the Western Circuit” (see vol. F, [p. 36](#)).

**onomatopoeia** (Greek “name making”): a **figure of speech**. Verbal sounds that imitate and evoke the sounds they denote. Hopkins, “Binsey Poplars,” lines 10–12 (about some felled trees): “O if we but knew what we do / When we delve [dig] or hew— / Hack and rack the growing green!” (see vol. E, [p. 726](#)).

**order:** A story may be told in different narrative orders. A narrator might use the sequence of events as they happened, and thereby follow what **classical** rhetoricians called the *natural order*; alternatively, the narrator might reorder the sequence of events, beginning the narration either in the middle or at the end of the sequence of events, thereby following an *artificial order*. If a narrator

begins in the middle of events, he or she is said to begin *in medias res* (Latin "in the middle of the matter"). For a brief discussion of these concepts, see Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, "A Letter of the Authors" (vol. B, [p. 265](#)). Modern narratology makes a related distinction, between *histoire* (French "story") for the natural order that readers mentally reconstruct, and *discours* (French, here "narration") for the narrative as presented. See also **plot** and **story**.

**ottava rima: a verse form.** An eight-line stanza form, rhyming abababcc, using **iambic pentameter**; Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium" (see vol. F, [p. 234](#)). Derived from the Italian poet Boccaccio, an eight-line stanza was used by fifteenth-century English poets for inset passages (for example, Christ's speech from the Cross in Lydgate's *Testament*, lines 754–897). The form in this rhyme scheme was used in English poetry for long narrative by, for example, Byron (*Don Juan*; see vol. D, [p. 690](#)).

**oxymoron** (Greek "sharp blunt"): a **figure of thought**. The conjunction of normally incompatible terms; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.63: "darkness visible" (see vol. B, [p. 1431](#)).

**panegyric: a genre.** Demonstrative, or epideictic (Greek "showing"), rhetoric was a branch of **classical** rhetoric. Its own two main branches were the rhetoric of praise on the one hand and of vituperation on the other. Panegyric, or eulogy (Greek "sweet speaking"), or encomium (plural *encomia*), is the term used to describe the speeches or writings of praise.

**parable: a genre.** A simple story designed to provoke, and often accompanied by, **allegorical** interpretation, most famously by Christ as reported in the Gospels.

**paradox** (Greek "contrary to received opinion"): a **figure of thought**. An apparent contradiction that requires thought to reveal an inner consistency. Chaucer, "Troilus's Song," line 12: "O sweete harm so quainte" (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

**parataxis**, or **coordination** (respectively Greek and Latin “ordering beside”): a term of **syntax**. The coordination, by the use of coordinating conjunctions, of different main clauses in a single sentence. Malory, *Morte Darthur*: “So Sir Lancelot departed and took his sword under his arm, and so he walked in his mantel, that noble knight, and put himself in great jeopardy” (see vol. A, [p. 607](#)). The opposite principle to **hypotaxis**.

**parody**: a work that uses the **conventions** of a particular genre with the aim of comically mocking a **topos**, a genre, or a particular exponent of a genre. Shakespeare parodies the topos of **blazon** in Sonnet 130 (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**pastoral** (from Latin *pastor*, “shepherd”): a **genre**. Pastoral is set among shepherds, making often refined **allusion** to other apparently unconnected subjects (sometimes politics) from the potentially idyllic world of highly literary if illiterate shepherds. Pastoral is distinguished from **georgic** by representing recreational rural idleness, whereas the georgic offers instruction on how to manage rural labor. English writers had classical models in the *Idylls* of Theocritus in Greek and Virgil’s *Eclogues* in Latin. Pastoral is also called bucolic (from the Greek word for “herdsman”). Thus Spenser, *Shepheardes Calender* (see vol. B, [p. 257](#)).

**pathetic fallacy**: the attribution of sentiment to natural phenomena, as if they were in sympathy with human feelings. Thus Milton, *Lycidas*, lines 146–47: “With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head, / And every flower that sad embroidery wears” (see vol. B, [p. 1406](#)). For critique of the practice, see Ruskin (who coined the term), “Of the Pathetic Fallacy” (vol. E, [p. 467](#)).

**pentameter** (Greek “five measure”): a term of **meter**. In English verse, a five-stress line. Between the late fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, this meter, frequently employing an iambic rhythm, was the basic line of English verse. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth each, for example, deployed this very

flexible line as their primary resource; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.128: "O Prince, O Chief of many thronèd Powers" (see vol. B, [p. 1433](#)).

**performative:** Verbal expressions have many different functions. They can, for example, be descriptive, or constative (if they make an argument), or performative, for example. A performative utterance is one that makes something happen in the world by virtue of its utterance. "I hereby sentence you to ten years in prison," if uttered in the appropriate circumstances, itself performs an action; it makes something happen in the world. By virtue of its performing an action, it is called a "performative." See also **speech act**.

**peripeteia** (Greek "turning about"): the sudden reversal of fortune (in both directions) in a dramatic work.

**periphrasis** (Greek "declaring around"): a **figure of thought**. Circumlocution; the use of many words to express what could be expressed in few or one; Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 39.1–4.

**persona** (Latin "sound through"): originally the mask worn in the Roman theater to magnify an actor's voice; in literary discourse *persona* (plural *personae*) refers to the narrator or speaker of a text, whose voice is coherent and whose person need have no relation to the person of the actual author of a text. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (see vol. F, [p. 498](#)).

**personification**, or **prosopopoeia** (Greek "person making"): a **figure of thought**. The attribution of human qualities to nonhuman forces or objects; Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," lines 1–2: "Thou still unvanish'd bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time" (see vol. D, [p. 971](#)).

**plot:** the sequence of events in a story as narrated, as distinct from **story**, which refers to the sequence of events as we reconstruct them from the plot. See also **order**.

**point of view:** All of the many kinds of writing involve a point of view from which a text is, or seems to be, generated. The presence of such a point of view may be powerful and explicit, as in many novels, or deliberately invisible, as in much drama. In some genres, such as the **novel**, the narrator does not necessarily tell the story from a position we can predict; that is, the needs of a particular story, not the **conventions** of the genre, determine the narrator's position. In other genres, the narrator's position is fixed by convention; in certain kinds of love poetry, for example, the narrating voice is always that of a suffering lover. Not only does the point of view significantly inform the style of a work, but it also informs the structure of that work.

**protagonist** (Greek "first actor"): the hero or heroine of a drama or narrative.

**pun: a figure of thought.** A sometimes irresolvable doubleness of meaning in a single word or expression; Shakespeare, Sonnet 135, line 1: "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*" (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**quatrain: a verse form.** A stanza of four lines, usually rhyming abcb, abab, or abba. Of many possible examples, see Crashaw, "On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord" (see vol. B, [p. 1214](#)).

**refrain:** usually a single line repeated as the last line of consecutive stanzas, sometimes with subtly different wording and ideally with subtly different meaning as the poem progresses.

**register:** The register of a word is its stylistic level, which can be distinguished by degree of technicality but also by degree of formality. We choose our words from different registers according to context, that is, audience and/or environment. Thus a chemist in a laboratory will say "sodium chloride," a cook in a kitchen "salt." A formal register designates the kind of language used in polite society (for example, "Mr. President"), while an informal or colloquial

register is used in less formal or more relaxed social situations (for example, “the boss”). In **classical** and medieval rhetoric, these registers of formality were called *high style* and *low style*. A *middle style* was defined as the style fit for narrative, not drawing attention to itself.

**rhetoric:** the art of verbal persuasion. **Classical** rhetoricians distinguished three areas of rhetoric: the forensic, to be used in law courts; the deliberative, to be used in political or philosophical deliberations; and the demonstrative, or epideictic, to be used for the purposes of public praise or blame. Rhetorical manuals covered all the skills required of a speaker, from the management of style and structure to delivery. These manuals powerfully influenced the theory of poetics as a separate branch of verbal practice, particularly in the matter of style.

**rhyme:** a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical vowel sounds in stressed syllables whose initial consonants differ (“dead” / “head”). In poetry, rhyme often links the end of one line with another. *Masculine rhyme*: full rhyme on the final syllable of the line (“decays” / “days”). *Feminine rhyme*: full rhyme on syllables that are followed by unaccented syllables (“fountains” / “mountains”). *Internal rhyme*: full rhyme within a single line; Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, line 7: “The guests are met, the feast is set” (see vol. D, [p. 475](#)). *Rhyme riche*: rhyming on **homophones**; Chaucer, *General Prologue*, lines 17–18: “seeke” / “seke.” *Off rhyme* (also known as *half rhyme*, *near rhyme*, or *slant rhyme*): differs from perfect rhyme in changing the vowel sound and/or the concluding consonants expected of perfect rhyme; Byron, “They say that Hope is Happiness,” lines 5–7: “most” / “lost.” *Pararhyme*: stressed vowel sounds differ but are flanked by identical or similar consonants; Owen, “Miners,” lines 9–11: “simmer” / “summer” (see vol. F, [p. 169](#)).

**rhyme royal:** a **verse form**. A **stanza** of seven **iambic pentameter** lines, rhyming ababbcc; first introduced by Chaucer



and called “royal” because the form was used by James I of Scotland for his *Kingis Quair* in the early fifteenth century. Chaucer, “Troilus’s Song” (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

**rhythm:** Rhythm is not absolutely distinguishable from **meter**. One way of making a clear distinction between these terms is to say that rhythm (from the Greek “to flow”) denotes the patterns of sound within the feet of verse lines and the combination of those feet. Very often a particular meter will raise expectations that a given rhythm will be used regularly through a whole line or a whole poem. Thus in English verse the pentameter regularly uses an iambic rhythm. Rhythm, however, is much more fluid than meter, and many lines within the same poem using a single meter will frequently exploit different rhythmic possibilities. For examples of different rhythms, see **iamb**, **trochee**, **anapest**, **spondee**, and **dactyl**.

**romance:** a **genre**. From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the main form of European narrative, in either verse or prose, was that of chivalric romance. Romance, like the later **novel**, is a very fluid genre, but romances are often characterized by (i) a tripartite structure of social integration, followed by disintegration, involving moral tests and often marvelous events, itself the prelude to reintegration in a happy ending, frequently of marriage; and (ii) aristocratic social milieux. Thus *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)); Spenser’s (unfinished) *Faerie Queene* (vol. B, [p. 263](#)). The immensely popular, fertile genre was absorbed, in both domesticated and undomesticated form, by the novel. For an adaptation of romance, see Chaucer, *Wife of Bath’s Tale* (vol. A, [p. 512](#)).

**sarcasm** (Greek “flesh tearing”): a **figure of thought**. A wounding expression, often expressed ironically; Boswell, *Life of Johnson*: Johnson [asked if any man of the modern age could have written the **epic** poem *Fingal*] replied, “Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children” (see vol. C, [p. 891](#)).



**satire** (Latin for “a bowl of mixed fruits”): a **genre**. In Roman literature (for example, Juvenal), the communication, in the form of a letter between equals, complaining of the ills of contemporary society. The genre in this form is characterized by a first-person narrator exasperated by social ills; the letter form; a high frequency of contemporary reference; and the use of invective in **low-style** language. Pope practices the genre thus in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (see vol. C, [p. 573](#)). Wyatt’s “Mine Own John Pains” (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)) draws ultimately on a gentler, Horatian model of the genre.

**satiric mode:** Works in a very large variety of genres are devoted to the more or less savage attack on social ills. Thus Swift’s travel narrative *Gulliver’s Travels* (see vol. C, [p. 377](#)), his **essay** “A Modest Proposal” (vol. C, [p. 511](#)), and Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* (vol. C, [p. 587](#)), to look no further than the eighteenth century, are all within a satiric mode.

**scene:** a subdivision of an **act**, itself a subdivision of a dramatic performance and/or text. The action of a scene usually occurs in one place.

**sensibility** (from Latin, “capable of being perceived by the senses”): as a literary term, an eighteenth-century concept derived from moral philosophy that stressed the social importance of fellow feeling and particularly of sympathy in social relations. The concept generated a literature of “sensibility,” such as the sentimental **novel** (the most famous of which was Goethe’s *Sorrows of the Young Werther* [1774]), or sentimental poetry, such as Cowper’s passage on the stricken deer in *The Task* (see vol. C, [p. 1076](#)).

**short story:** a **genre**. Generically similar to, though shorter and more concentrated than, the **novel**; often published as part of a collection. Thus Mansfield, “The Daughters of the Late Colonel” (see vol. F, [p. 542](#)).

**simile** (Latin “like”): a **figure of thought**. Comparison, usually using the word “like” or “as,” of one thing with another so as to produce sometimes surprising analogies. Donne, “The Storm,” lines 29–30: “Sooner than you read this line did the gale, / Like shot, not feared till felt, our sails assail.” Frequently used, in extended form, in **epic** poetry; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.338–46 (see vol. B, [p. 1438](#)).

**soliloquy** (Latin “single speaking”): a **topos** of drama, in which a **character**, alone or thinking to be alone on stage, speaks so as to give the audience access to his or her private thoughts.

**sonnet**: a **verse form**. A form combining a variable number of units of rhymed lines to produce a fourteen-line poem, usually in rhyming **iambic pentameter** lines. In English there are two principal varieties: the Petrarchan sonnet, formed by an octave (an eight-line stanza, often broken into two **quatrains** having the same rhyme scheme, typically abba abba) and a sestet (a six-line stanza, typically cdecde or cdcdcd); and the Shakespearean sonnet, formed by three quatrains (abab cdcd efef) and a **couplet** (gg). The declaration of a sonnet can take a sharp turn, or “volta,” often at the decisive formal shift from octave to sestet in the Petrarchan sonnet, or in the final couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet, introducing a trenchant counterstatement. Derived from Italian poetry, and especially from the poetry of Petrarch, the sonnet was first introduced to English poetry by Wyatt, and initially used principally for the expression of unrequited erotic love, though later poets used the form for many other purposes. See Wyatt, “Whoso List to Hunt” (vol. B, [p. 123](#)); Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (vol. B, [p. 541](#)); Shakespeare, *Sonnets* (vol. B, [p. 624](#)); Wordsworth, “London, 1802” (vol. D, [p. 390](#)); McKay, “If We Must Die” (vol. F, [p. 576](#)); Heaney, “Clearances” (vol. F, [p. 970](#)).

**speech act**: Words and deeds are often distinguished, but words are often (perhaps always) themselves deeds. Utterances can perform different speech acts, such as promising, declaring, casting

a spell, encouraging, persuading, denying, lying, and so on. See also **performative**.

**Spenserian stanza:** a **verse form**. The stanza developed by Spenser for *The Faerie Queene*; nine **iambic** lines, the first eight of which are **pentameters**, followed by one **hexameter**, rhyming ababbcbcc. See also, for example, Shelley, *Adonais* (vol. D, [p. 851](#)), and Keats, *The Eve of St. Agnes* (vol. D, [p. 953](#)).

**spondee:** a term of **meter**. A two-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two stressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Utah."

**stanza** (Italian "room"): groupings of two or more lines, though "stanza" is usually reserved for groupings of at least four lines. Stanzas are often joined by rhyme, often in sequence, where each group shares the same metrical pattern and, when rhymed, rhyme scheme. Stanzas can themselves be arranged into larger groupings. Poets often invent new **verse forms**, or they may work within established forms.

**story:** a narrative's sequence of events, which we reconstruct from those events as they have been recounted by the narrator (i.e., the **plot**). See also **order**.

**stream of consciousness:** usually a **first-person** narrative that seems to give the reader access to the narrator's mind as it perceives or reflects on events, prior to organizing those perceptions into a coherent narrative. Thus (though generated from a **third-person** narrative) Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Penelope" (see vol. F, [p. 452](#)).

**style** (from Latin for "writing instrument"): In literary works the manner in which something is expressed contributes substantially to its meaning. The expressions "sun," "mass of helium at the center of the solar system," "heaven's golden orb" all designate "sun," but do so in different manners, or styles, which produce different meanings. The manner of a literary work is its "style," the effect of which is its

“tone.” We often can intuit the tone of a text; from that intuition of tone we can analyze the stylistic resources by which it was produced. We can analyze the style of literary works through consideration of different elements of style; for example, **diction, figures of thought, figures of speech, meter and rhythm, verse form, syntax, point of view.**

**sublime:** As a concept generating a literary movement, the sublime refers to the realm of experience beyond the measurable, and so beyond the rational, produced especially by the terrors and grandeur of natural phenomena. Derived especially from the first-century Greek treatise *On the Sublime*, sometimes attributed to Longinus, the notion of the sublime was in the later eighteenth century a spur to Romanticism.

**syllable:** the smallest unit of sound in a pronounced word. The syllable that receives the greatest stress is called the *tonic* syllable.

**symbol** (Greek “token”): a **figure of thought**. Something that stands for something else, and yet seems necessarily to evoke that other thing. In Neoplatonic, and therefore Romantic, theory, to be distinguished from **allegory** thus: whereas allegory involves connections between vehicle and tenor agreed by convention or made explicit, the meanings of a symbol are supposedly inherent to it.

**synecdoche** (Greek “to take with something else”): a **figure of thought**. Using a part to express the whole, or vice versa; for example, “all hands on deck.” Closely related to **metonymy**.

**syntax** (Greek “ordering with”): Syntax designates the rules by which sentences are constructed in a given language. Discussion of meter is impossible without some reference to syntax, since the overall effect of a poem is, in part, always the product of a subtle balance of meter and sentence construction. Syntax is also essential to the understanding of prose style, since prose writers, deprived of

the full shaping possibilities of meter, rely all the more heavily on syntactic resources. A working command of syntactical practice requires an understanding of the parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, and interjections), since writers exploit syntactic possibilities by using particular combinations and concentrations of the parts of speech.

**taste** (from Italian “touch”): Although medieval monastic traditions used eating and tasting as a metaphor for reading, the concept of taste as a personal ideal to be cultivated by, and applied to, the appreciation and judgment of works of art in general was developed in the eighteenth century.

**tercet:** a **verse form**. A stanza or group of three lines, used in larger forms such as **terza rima**, the **Petrarchan sonnet**, and the **villanelle**.

**terza rima:** a **verse form**. A sequence of rhymed **tercets** linked by rhyme thus: aba bcb cdc, etc. first used extensively by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, the form was adapted in English **iambic pentameters** by Wyatt and revived in the nineteenth century. See Wyatt, “Mine Own John Poins” (vol. B, [p. 131](#)); Shelley, “Ode to the West Wind” (vol. D, [p. 802](#)); and Morris, “The Defence of Guinevere” (vol. E, [p. 657](#)). For modern adaptations see Eliot, lines 78–149 (though unrhymed) of “Little Gidding” (vol. F, [pp. 523–25](#)); Heaney, “Station Island” (vol. F, [p. 968](#)); Walcott, *Omeros* (vol. F, [p. 806](#)).

**tetrameter** (Greek “four measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with four stresses. Coleridge, *Christabel*, line 31: “She stole along, she nothing spoke” (see vol. D, [p. 495](#)).

**theme** (Greek “proposition”): In literary criticism the term designates what the work is about; the theme is the concept that unifies a given work of literature.

**third-person narration:** relevant to **point of view**. A narration in which the narrator recounts a narrative of **characters** referred to

explicitly or implicitly by third-person pronouns ("he," "she," etc.), without the limitation of a **first-person narration**. Thus Johnson, *The History of Rasselas*.

**topographical poem** (Greek "place writing"): a **genre**. A poem devoted to the meditative description of particular places.

**topos** (Greek "place," plural *topoi*): a commonplace in the content of a given kind of literature. Originally, in **classical** rhetoric, the *topoi* were tried-and-tested stimuli to literary invention: lists of standard headings under which a subject might be investigated. In medieval narrative poems, for example, it was commonplace to begin with a description of spring. Writers did, of course, render the commonplace uncommon, as in Chaucer's spring scene at the opening of *The Canterbury Tales* (see vol. A, [p. 474](#)).

**tradition** (from Latin "passing on"): A literary tradition is whatever is passed on or revived from the past in a single literary culture, or drawn from others to enrich a writer's culture. "Tradition" is fluid in reference, ranging from small to large referents: thus it may refer to a relatively small aspect of texts (for example, the tradition of **iambic pentameter**), or it may, at the other extreme, refer to the body of texts that constitute a **canon**.

**tragedy**: a **genre**. A dramatic representation of the fall of kings or nobles, beginning in happiness and ending in catastrophe. Later transferred to other social milieux. The opposite of **comedy**; thus Shakespeare, *Othello* (see vol. B, [p. 640](#)).

**tragic mode**: Many genres (**epic** poetry, **legendary** chronicles, **tragedy**, the **novel**) either do or can participate in a tragic mode, by representing the fall of noble **protagonists** and the irreparable ravages of human society and history.

**tragicomedy**: a **genre**. A play in which potentially tragic events turn out to have a happy, or **comic**, ending. Thus Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*.

**translation** (Latin “carrying across”): the rendering of a text written in one language into another.

**trimeter** (Greek “three measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with three stresses. Herbert, “Discipline,” line 1: “Throw away thy rod” (see vol. B, [p. 1197](#)).

**triplet:** a **verse form**. A **tercet** rhyming on the same sound. Pope inserts triplets among heroic **couplets** to emphasize a particular thought; see *Essay on Criticism*, 315–17 (vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

**trochee:** a term of **rhythm**. A two-syllable foot following the pattern, in English verse, of stressed followed by unstressed syllable, producing a falling effect. Thus, for example, “Texas.”

**type** (Greek “impression, figure”): a **figure of thought**. In Christian allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, pre-Christian figures were regarded as “types,” or foreshadowings, of Christ or the Christian dispensation. *Typology* has been the source of much visual and literary art in which the parallelisms between old and new are extended to nonbiblical figures; thus the virtuous plowman in *Piers Plowman* becomes a type of Christ.

**unities:** According to a theory supposedly derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the events represented in a play should have unity of time, place, and action: that the play take up no more time than the time of the play, or at most a day; that the space of action should be within a single city; and that there should be no subplot. See Johnson, *The Preface to Shakespeare* (vol. C, [p. 876](#)).

**vernacular** (from Latin *verna*, “servant”): the language of the people, as distinguished from learned and arcane languages. From the later Middle Ages especially, the “vernacular” languages and literatures of Europe distinguished themselves from the learned languages and literatures of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

**verse form:** The terms related to **meter** and **rhythm** describe the shape of individual lines. Lines of verse are combined to produce larger groupings, called verse forms. These larger groupings are in the first instance **stanzas**. The combination of a certain meter and stanza shape constitutes the verse form, of which there are many standard kinds.

**villanelle:** a **verse form**. A fixed form of usually five **tercets** and a **quatrain** employing only two rhyme sounds altogether, rhyming aba for the tercets and abaa for the quatrain, with a complex pattern of two **refrains**. Derived from a French fixed form. Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (see vol. F, [p. 693](#)).

**wit:** Originally a synonym for "reason" in Old and Middle English, "wit" became a literary ideal in the Renaissance as brilliant play of the full range of mental resources. For eighteenth-century writers, the notion necessarily involved pleasing expression, as in Pope's definition of true wit as "Nature to advantage dressed, / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" (*Essay on Criticism*, lines 297–98; see vol. C, [p. 527](#)). Romantic theory of the imagination deprived wit of its full range of apprehension, whence the word came to be restricted to its modern sense, as the clever play of mind that produces laughter.

**zeugma** (Greek "a yoking"): a **figure of thought**. A figure whereby one word applies to two or more words in a sentence, and in which the applications are surprising, either because one is unusual, or because the applications are made in very different ways; Pope, *Rape of the Lock* 3.7–8, in which the word "take" is used in two senses: "Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, / Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea" (see vol. C, [p. 546](#)).

## **B: Publishing History, Censorship**



By the time we read texts in published books, they have already been treated—that is, changed by authors, editors, and printers—in many ways. Although there are differences across history, in each period literary works are subject to pressures of many kinds, which apply before, while, and after an author writes. The pressures might be financial, as in the relations of author and patron; commercial, as in the marketing of books; and legal, as in, during some periods, the negotiation through official and unofficial censorship. In addition, texts in all periods undergo technological processes, as they move from the material forms in which an author produced them to the forms in which they are presented to readers. Some of the terms below designate important material forms in which books were produced, disseminated, and surveyed across the historical span of this anthology. Others designate the skills developed to understand these processes. The anthology's introductions to individual periods discuss the particular forms these phenomena took in different eras.

**bookseller:** In England, and particularly in London, commercial bookmaking and -selling enterprises came into being in the early fourteenth century. These were loose organizations of artisans who usually lived in the same neighborhoods (around St. Paul's Cathedral in London). A bookseller or dealer would coordinate the production of hand-copied books for wealthy patrons (see **patronage**), who would order books to be custom-made. After the introduction of **printing** in the late fifteenth century, authors generally sold the rights to their work to booksellers, without any further **royalties**. Booksellers, who often had their own shops, belonged to the **Stationers' Company**. This system lasted into the eighteenth century. In 1710, however, authors were for the first time granted **copyright**, which tipped the commercial balance in their favor, against booksellers.

**censorship:** The term applies to any mechanism for restricting what can be published. Historically, the reasons for imposing censorship are heresy, sedition, blasphemy, libel, or obscenity. External censorship is imposed by institutions having legislative

sanctions at their disposal. Thus the pre-Reformation Church imposed the Constitutions of Archbishop Arundel of 1409, aimed at repressing the Lollard “heresy.” After the Reformation, some key events in the history of censorship are as follows: 1547, when anti-Lollard legislation and legislation made by Henry VIII concerning treason by writing (1534) were abolished; the Licensing Order of 1643, which legislated that works be licensed, through the Stationers’ Company, prior to publication; and 1695, when the last such Act stipulating prepublication licensing lapsed. Postpublication censorship continued in different periods for different reasons. Thus, for example, British publication of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) was obstructed (though unsuccessfully) in 1960, under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. Censorship can also be international: although not published in Iran, Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1988) was censored in that country, where the leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, proclaimed a fatwa (religious decree) promising the author’s execution. Very often censorship is not imposed externally, however: authors or publishers can censor work in anticipation of what will incur the wrath of readers or the penalties of the law. Victorian and Edwardian publishers of **novels**, for example, urged authors to remove potentially offensive material, especially for serial publication in popular magazines.

**codex:** the physical format of most modern books and medieval manuscripts, consisting of a series of separate leaves gathered into quires and bound together, often with a cover. In late antiquity, the codex largely replaced the scroll, the standard form of written documents in Roman culture.

**copy text:** the particular text of a work used by a textual editor as the basis of an edition of that work.

**copyright:** the legal protection afforded to authors for control of their work’s publication, in an attempt to ensure due financial reward. Some key dates in the history of copyright in the United Kingdom are as follows: 1710, when a statute gave authors the

exclusive right to publish their work for fourteen years, and fourteen years more if the author were still alive when the first term had expired; 1842, when the period of authorial control was extended to forty-two years; and 1911, when the term was extended yet further, to fifty years after the author's death. In 1995 the period of protection was harmonized with the laws in other European countries to be the life of the author plus seventy years. In the United States no works first published before 1923 are in copyright. Works published since 1978 are, as in the United Kingdom, protected for the life of the author plus seventy years.

**folio:** the leaf formed by both sides of a single page. Each folio has two sides: a *recto* (the front side of the leaf, on the right side of a double-page spread in an open codex), and a *verso* (the back side of the leaf, on the left side of a double-page spread). Modern book pagination follows the pattern 1, 2, 3, 4, while medieval manuscript pagination follows the pattern 1r, 1v, 2r, 2v. "Folio" can also designate the size of a printed book. Books come in different shapes, depending originally on the number of times a standard sheet of paper is folded. One fold produces a large volume, a *folio* book; two folds produce a *quarto*, four an *octavo*, and six a very small *duodecimo*. Generally speaking, the larger the book, the grander and more expensive. Shakespeare's plays were, for example, first printed in quartos, but were gathered into a folio edition in 1623.

**foul papers:** versions of a work before an author has produced, if she or he has, a final copy (a "fair copy") with all corrections removed.

**incunabulum** (plural "incunabula"): any printed book produced in Europe before 1501. Famous incunabula include the Gutenberg Bible, printed in 1455.

**manuscript** (Latin, "written by hand"): Any text written physically by hand is a manuscript. Before the introduction of **printing** with moveable type in 1476, all texts in England were produced and

reproduced by hand, in manuscript. This is an extremely labor-intensive task, using expensive materials (for example, **vellum**, or **parchment**); the cost of books produced thereby was, accordingly, very high. Even after the introduction of printing, many texts continued to be produced in manuscript. This is obviously true of letters, for example, but until the eighteenth century, poetry written within aristocratic circles was often transmitted in manuscript copies.

**paleography** (Greek “ancient writing”): the art of deciphering, describing, and dating forms of handwriting.

**parchment**: animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **vellum**.

**patronage, patron** (Latin “protector”): Many technological, legal, and commercial supports were necessary before professional authorship became possible. Although some playwrights (for example, Shakespeare) made a living by writing for the theater, other authors needed, principally, the large-scale reproductive capacities of **printing** and the security of **copyright** to make a living from writing. Before these conditions obtained, many authors had another main occupation, and most authors had to rely on patronage. In different periods, institutions or individuals offered material support, or patronage, to authors. Thus in Anglo-Saxon England, monasteries afforded the conditions of writing to monastic authors. Between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries, the main source of patronage was the royal court. Authors offered patrons prestige and ideological support in return for financial support. Even as the conditions of professional authorship came into being at the beginning of the eighteenth century, older forms of direct patronage were not altogether displaced until the middle of the century.

**periodical**: Whereas journalism, strictly, applies to daily writing (from French *jour*, “day”), periodical writing appears at larger, but

still frequent, intervals, characteristically in the form of the **essay**. Periodicals were developed especially in the eighteenth century.

**printing:** Printing, or the mechanical reproduction of books using moveable type, was invented in Germany in the mid-fifteenth century by Johannes Gutenberg; it quickly spread throughout Europe. William Caxton brought printing into England from the Low Countries in 1476. Much greater powers of reproduction at much lower prices transformed every aspect of literary culture.

**publisher:** the person or company responsible for the commissioning and publicizing of printed matter. In the early period of **printing**, publisher, printer, and bookseller were often the same person. This trend continued in the ascendancy of the **Stationers' Company**, between the middle of the sixteenth and the end of the seventeenth centuries. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, these three functions began to separate, leading to their modern distinctions.

**quire:** When medieval manuscripts were assembled, a few loose sheets of parchment or paper would first be folded together and sewn along the fold. This formed a quire (also known as a "gathering" or "signature"). Folded in this way, four large sheets of parchment would produce eight smaller manuscript leaves. Multiple quires could then be bound together to form a codex.

**royalties:** an agreed-upon proportion of the price of each copy of a work sold, paid by the publisher to the author, or an agreed-upon fee paid to the playwright for each performance of a play.

**scribe:** In **manuscript** culture, the scribe is the copyist who reproduces a text by hand.

**scriptorium** (plural "scriptoria"): a place for producing written documents and manuscripts.

**serial publication:** generally referring to the practice, especially common in the nineteenth century, of publishing novels a few chapters at a time, in periodicals.

**Stationers' Company:** The Stationers' Company was an English guild incorporating various tradesmen, including printers, publishers, and booksellers, skilled in the production and selling of books. It was formed in 1403, received its royal charter in 1557, and served as a means both of producing and of regulating books. Authors would sell the manuscripts of their books to individual stationers, who incurred the risks and took the profits of producing and selling the books. The stationers entered their rights over given books in the Stationers' Register. They also regulated the book trade and held their monopoly by licensing books and by being empowered to seize unauthorized books and imprison resisters. This system of licensing broke down in the social unrest of the Civil War and Interregnum (1640–60), and it ended in 1695. Even after the end of licensing, the Stationers' Company continued to be an intrinsic part of the **copyright** process, since the 1710 copyright statute directed that copyright had to be registered at Stationers' Hall.

**subscription:** An eighteenth-century system of bookselling somewhere between direct **patronage** and impersonal sales. A subscriber paid half the cost of a book before publication and half on delivery. The author received these payments directly. The subscriber's name appeared in the prefatory pages.

**textual criticism:** Works in all periods often exist in many subtly or not so subtly different forms. This is especially true with regard to manuscript textual reproduction, but it also applies to printed texts. Textual criticism is the art, developed from the fifteenth century in Italy but raised to new levels of sophistication from the eighteenth century, of deciphering different historical states of texts. This art involves the analysis of textual **variants**, often with the aim of distinguishing authorial from scribal forms.

**variants:** differences that appear among different manuscripts or printed editions of the same text.

**vellum:** animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **parchment**.

**watermark:** the trademark of a paper manufacturer, impressed into the paper but largely invisible unless held up to light.

## Endnotes

- Note \*: This appendix was devised and compiled by James Simpson with the collaboration of all the editors. We especially thank Professor Lara Bovilsky of the University of Oregon at Eugene for her help. [Return to reference \\*](#)

# Geographic Nomenclature

**The British Isles** refers to the prominent group of islands off the northwest coast of Europe, especially to the two largest, **Great Britain** and **Ireland**. At present these comprise two sovereign states: **the Republic of Ireland**, and **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**—known for short as the **United Kingdom** or the **U.K.** Most of the smaller islands are part of the **U.K.** but a few, like the **Isle of Man** and the tiny **Channel Islands**, are largely independent. The **U.K.** is often loosely referred to as “**Britain**” or “**Great Britain**” and is sometimes called simply, if inaccurately, “**England**.” For obvious reasons, the latter usage is rarely heard among the inhabitants of the other countries of the **U.K.—Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland** (sometimes called **Ulster**). England is by far the most populous part of the kingdom, as well as the seat of its capital, London.

From the first to the fifth century C.E. most of what is now **England** and **Wales** was a province of the Roman Empire called **Britain** (in Latin, **Britannia**). After the fall of Rome, much of the island was invaded and settled by peoples from northern Germany and Denmark speaking what we now call Old English. These peoples are known as the Angles and the Saxons (the word **England** is related to **Angles**). By the time of the Norman Conquest (1066) most of the kingdoms founded by the Angles, the Saxons, and the subsequent Viking invaders had coalesced into the kingdom of **England**, which, in the latter Middle Ages, conquered and largely absorbed the neighboring Celtic kingdom of **Wales**. In 1603 James VI of **Scotland** inherited the island’s other throne as James I of **England**, and for the next hundred years—except for the two decades of Puritan rule—**Scotland** (both its English-speaking **Lowlands** and its Gaelic-speaking **Highlands**) and **England** (with **Wales**) were two kingdoms under a single king. In 1707 the Act of Union brought them together as **the United Kingdom of Great**



**Britain. Ireland**, where English rule had begun in the twelfth century and been tightened in the sixteenth, was incorporated by the 1800–1801 Act of Union into **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**. With the division of Ireland and the establishment of **the Irish Free State** after World War I, this name was modified to its present form, and in 1949 **the Irish Free State** became **the Republic of Ireland**, or **Éire**. In 1999 **Scotland** elected a separate parliament it had relinquished in 1707, and **Wales** elected an assembly it lost in 1409; neither Scotland nor Wales ceased to be part of the **United Kingdom**.

The **British Isles** are further divided into counties, which in **Great Britain** are also known as shires. This word, with its vowel shortened in pronunciation, forms the suffix in the names of many counties, such as **Yorkshire, Wiltshire, Somersetshire**.

The Latin names **Britannia (Britain), Caledonia (Scotland),** and **Hibernia (Ireland)** are sometimes used in poetic diction; so too is **Britain's** ancient Celtic name, **Albion**. Because of its accidental resemblance to *albus* (Latin for “white”), **Albion** is especially associated with the chalk cliffs that seem to gird much of the English coast like defensive walls.

**The British Empire** took its name from **the British Isles** because it was created not only by the **English** but also by the **Irish, Scots, and Welsh**, as well as by civilians and servicemen from other constituent countries of the empire. Some of the empire's **overseas colonies**, or **crown colonies**, were populated largely by settlers of European origin and their descendants. These predominantly White **settler colonies**, such as **Canada, Australia, and New Zealand**, were allowed significant self-government in the nineteenth century and recognized as **dominions** in the early twentieth century. The **White dominions** became members of **the Commonwealth of Nations**, also called **the Commonwealth, the British Commonwealth**, and “**the Old Commonwealth**” at different times, an association of sovereign states under the symbolic leadership of the British monarch.

Other **overseas colonies** of the empire had mostly Indigenous populations (or, in the Caribbean, the descendants of enslaved people, indentured servants, and others). These **colonies** were granted political independence after World War II, later than the **dominions**, and have often been referred to since as **postcolonial** nations. In South and Southeast Asia, **India** and **Pakistan** gained independence in 1947, followed by other countries including **Sri Lanka** (formerly **Ceylon**), **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), **Malaya** (now **Malaysia**), and **Singapore**. In West and East Africa, the **Gold Coast** was decolonized as **Ghana** in 1957, **Nigeria** in 1960, **Sierra Leone** in 1961, **Uganda** in 1962, **Kenya** in 1963, and so forth, while in southern Africa, the White minority government of **South Africa** was already independent in 1931, though majority rule did not come until 1994. In the Caribbean, **Jamaica** and **Trinidad and Tobago** became independent in 1962, followed by **Barbados** in 1966, and other islands of the British West Indies in the 1970s and '80s. Other regions from which nations emerged out of British colonial rule included Central America (**British Honduras**, now **Belize**), South America (**British Guiana**, now **Guyana**), the Pacific islands (**Fiji**), and Europe (**Cyprus**, **Malta**). After decolonization, many of these nations chose to remain within a newly conceived **Commonwealth** and are sometimes referred to as "**New Commonwealth**" countries. Some nations, such as **Ireland**, **Pakistan**, and **South Africa**, withdrew from the **Commonwealth**, though **South Africa** and **Paki stan** eventually rejoined, and others, such as **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), gained independence outside the **Commonwealth**. Britain's last major overseas colony, **Hong Kong**, was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, but while Britain retains only a handful of dependent territories, such as **Bermuda** and **Montserrat**, the scope of the **Commonwealth** remains vast, with approximately 30 percent of the world's population.

# British Money

One of the most dramatic changes to the system of British money came in 1971. In the system previously in place, the pound consisted of 20 shillings, each containing 12 pence, making 240 pence to the pound. Since 1971, British money has been calculated on the decimal system, with 100 pence to the pound. Britons' experience of paper money did not change very drastically: as before, 5- and 10-pound notes constitute the majority of bills passing through their hands (in addition, 20- and 50-pound notes have been added). But the shift necessitated a whole new way of thinking about and exchanging coins and marked the demise of the shilling, one of the fundamental units of British monetary history. Many other coins, still frequently encountered in literature, had already passed. These include the groat, worth 4 pence (the word "groat" is often used to signify a trifling sum); the angel (which depicted the archangel Michael triumphing over a dragon), valued at 10 shillings; the mark, worth in its day two-thirds of a pound or 13 shillings 4 pence; and the sovereign, a gold coin initially worth 22 shillings 6 pence, later valued at 1 pound, last circulated in 1932. One prominent older coin, the guinea, was worth a pound and a shilling; though it has not been minted since 1813, a very few quality items or prestige awards (like the purse in a horse race) may still be quoted in guineas. (The table below includes some other obsolete coins.) Colloquially, a pound was (and is) called a quid; a shilling a bob; sixpence, a tanner; a copper could refer to a penny, a half-penny, or a farthing (1/4 penny).

<i>Old Currency</i>	<i>New Currency</i>
1 pound note	1 pound coin (or note in Scotland)
10 shilling (half-pound note)	50 pence
5 shilling (crown)	
2 1/2 shilling (half crown)	20 pence
2 shilling (florin)	10 pence
1 shilling	5 pence
6 pence	
2 1/2 pence	1 penny
2 pence	
1 penny	

1/2 penny	
1/4 penny (farthing)	

Throughout its tenure as a member of the European Union (1973–2020), Britain contemplated but did not make the change to the EU's common currency, the Euro, reflecting many Britons' strong identification of their country with its rich commercial history and view of their currency as a national symbol.

Even more challenging than sorting out the values of obsolete coins is calculating for any given period the purchasing power of money, which fluctuates over time by its very nature. As difficult as it is to generalize, it is clear that money used to be worth much more than it is currently. During the early Middle Ages, the most valuable circulating coin was the silver penny: four would buy a sheep. Beyond long-term inflationary trends, prices varied from times of plenty to those marked by poor harvests; from peacetime to wartime; from the country to the metropolis (life in London has always been very expensive); and wages varied according to the availability of labor (wages would sharply rise, for instance, during the devastating Black Death in the fourteenth century). The following chart provides a glimpse of some actual prices of given periods and their changes across time, though all the variables mentioned above prevent them from being definitive. Even from one year to the next, an added tax on gin or tea could drastically raise prices, and a lottery ticket could cost much more the night before the drawing than just a month earlier. Still, the prices quoted below do indicate important trends, such as the disparity of incomes in British society and the costs of basic commodities. In the chart on the following pages, the symbol £ is used for pound, s. for shilling, d. for a penny (from Latin *denarius*); a sum would normally be written £2.19.3—that is 2 pounds, 19 shillings, 3 pence. (This is Leopold Bloom's budget for the day depicted in Joyce's novel *Ulysses* [1922]; in the new currency, it would be about £2.96.)

circa	1390	1590	1650	1750	1815	1875
<i>food and drink</i>	gallon (8 pints) of ale, 1.5d.	tankard of beer, .5d.	coffee, 1d. a dish	"drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two-pence" (gin shop sign in Hogarth print)	ounce of laudanum, 3d.	pint of beer, 3d.
	gallon (8 pints) of wine, 3 to 4d.	pound of beef, 2s. 5d.	chicken, 1s. 4d.	dinner at a steakhouse, 1s.	ham and potato dinner for two, 7s.	dinner in a good hotel, 5s.
	pound of cinnamon, 1 to 3s.	pound of cinnamon, 10s. 6d.	pound of tea, £3 10s.	pound of tea, 16s.	bottle of French claret, 12s.	pound of tea, 2s.

<i>entertainment</i>	no cost to watch a cycle play	admission to public theater, 1 to 3d.	falcon, £11 5s.	theater tickets, 1 to 5s.	admission to Covent Garden theater, 1 to 7s.	theater tickets, 6d. to 7s.
	contributory admission to professional troupe theater	cheap seat in private theater, 6d.	billiard table, £25	admission to Vauxhall Gardens, 1s.	annual subscription to Almack's (exclusive club), 10 guineas	admission to Madam Tussaud's waxworks, 1s.
	maintenance for royal hounds at Windsor, .75d. a day	"to see a dead Indian" ( <i>The Tempest</i> 2.2.32), 1.25d. (ten "doits")	three-quarter length portrait painting, £31	lottery ticket, £20 (shares were sold)	Jane Austen's piano, 30 guineas	annual fees at a gentleman's club, 7 to 10 guineas
<i>reading</i>	cheap romance, 1s.	play quarto, 6d.	pamphlet, 1 to 6d.	issue of <i>The Gentleman's Magazine</i> , 6d.	issue of <i>Edinburgh Review</i> , 6s.	copy of the <i>Times</i> , 3d.
	a Latin Bible, 2 to £4	Shakespeare's <i>First Folio</i> (1623), £1	student Bible, 6s.	cheap edition of Milton, 2s.	membership in circulating library (3rd class), £1 4s. a year	illustrated edition of <i>Through the Looking-glass</i> , 6s.
	payment for illuminating a liturgical book, £22 9s.	Foxe's <i>Acts and Monuments</i> , 24s.	Hobbes's <i>Leviathan</i> , 8s.	Johnson's <i>Dictionary</i> , folio, 2 vols., £4 10s.	1st edition of Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , 18s.	1st edition of Trollope's <i>The Way We Live Now</i> , 2 vols., £1 1s.
<i>transportation</i>	night's supply of hay for horse, 2d.	wherry (whole boat) across Thames, 1d.	day's journey, coach, 10s.	boat across Thames, 4d.	coach ride, outside, 2 to 3d. a mile; inside, 4 to 5d. a mile	15-minute journey in a London cab, 1s. 6d.

	coach, £8	hiring a horse for a day, 12d.	coach horse, £30	coach fare, London to Edinburgh, £4 10s.	palanquin transport in Madras, 5s. a day	railway, 3rd class, London to Plymouth, 18s. 8d. (about 1d. a mile)
	quality horse, £10	hiring a coach for a day, 10s.	fancy carriage, £170	transport to America, £5	passage, Liverpool to New York, £10	passage to India, 1st class, £50
<i>clothes</i>	clothing allowance for peasant, 3s. a year	shoes with buckles, 8d.	footman's frieze coat, 15s.	working woman's gown, 6s. 6d.	checked muslin, 7s. per yard	flannel for a cheap petticoat, 1s. 3d. a yard
	shoes for gentry wearer, 4d.	woman's gloves, £1 5s.	falconer's hat, 10s.	gentleman's suit, £8	hiring a dressmaker for a pelisse, 8s.	overcoat for an Eton schoolboy, £1 1s.
	hat for gentry wearer, 10d.	fine cloak, £16	black cloth for mourning household of an earl, £100	very fine wig, £30	ladies silk stockings, 12s.	set of false teeth, £2 10s.
<i>labor/incomes</i>	hiring a skilled building worker, 4d. a day	actor's daily wage during playing season, 1s.	agricultural laborer, 6s. 5d. a week	price of enslaved boy, £32	lowest-paid sailor on Royal Navy ship, 10s. 9d. a month	seasonal agricultural laborer, 14s. a week
	wage for professional scribe, £2 3s. 4d. a year + cloak	household servant 2 to £5 a year + food, clothing	tutor to nobleman's children, £30 a year	housemaid's wage, £6 to £8 a year	contributor to <i>Quarterly Review</i> , 10 guineas per sheet	housemaid's wage, £10 to £25 a year

	minimum income to be called gentleman, £10 a year; for knighthood, 40 to £400	minimum income for eligibility for knighthood, £30 a year	Milton's salary as Secretary of Foreign Tongues, £288 a year	Boswell's allowance, £200 a year	minimum income for a "genteel" family, £100 a year	income of the "comfortable" classes, £800 and up a year
	income from land of richest magnates, £3,500 a year	income from land of average earl, £4,000 a year	Earl of Bedford's income, £8,000 a year	Duke of Newcastle's income, £40,000 a year	Mr. Darcy's income, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , £10,000	Trollope's income, £4,000 a year

# The British Baronage

The English monarchy is in principle hereditary, though at times during the Middle Ages the rules were subject to dispute. As it stands now, authority passes from parent to eldest surviving child, to siblings in order of seniority if there are no children, and in default of direct descendants to collateral lines (cousins, nephews, nieces) in order of closeness. There have been breaks in the order of succession (1066, 1399, 1688), but so far as possible the usurpers have always sought to paper over the break with a legitimate, that is, hereditary, claim. When a queen succeeds to the throne and takes a husband, he does not become king unless he is in the line of blood succession; rather, he is named prince consort, as Albert was to Victoria. He may be the father of kings, but he is not one himself.

The original Saxon nobles were the king's thanes, ealdormen, or earls, who provided the king with military service and counsel in return for booty, gifts, or landed estates. William the Conqueror, arriving from France, where feudalism was fully developed, considerably expanded this group. In addition, as the king distributed the lands of his new kingdom, he also distributed dignities to men who became known collectively as "the baronage." "Baron" in its root meaning signifies simply "man," and barons were the king's men. As the title was common, a distinction was early made between greater and lesser barons, the former gradually assuming loftier and more impressive titles. The first English "duke" was created in 1337; the title of "marquess," or "marquis" (pronounced "markwis"), followed in 1385, and "viscount" ("vyekount") in 1440. Though "earl" is the oldest title of all, an earl now comes between a marquess and a viscount in order of dignity and precedence, and the old term "baron" now designates a rank just below viscount. "Baronets" were created in 1611 as a means of raising revenue for the crown (the title could be purchased for about



£1,000); they are marginal nobility and have never sat in the House of Lords.

Kings and queens are addressed as “Your Majesty,” princes and princesses as “Your Highness,” the other hereditary nobility as “My Lord” or “Your Lordship.” Peers receive their titles either by inheritance (like Lord Byron, the sixth baron of that line) or from the monarch (like Alfred, Lord Tennyson, created 1st Baron Tennyson by Victoria). The children, even of a duke, are commoners unless they are specifically granted some other title or inherit their father’s title from him. A peerage can be forfeited by act of attainder, as for example when a lord is convicted of treason; and, when forfeited, or lapsed for lack of a successor, can be bestowed on another family. Thus in 1605 Robert Cecil was made first Earl of Salisbury in the third creation, the first creation dating from 1149, the second from 1337, the title having been in abeyance since 1539. Titles descend by right of succession and do not depend on tenure of land; thus, a title does not always indicate where a lord dwells or holds power. Indeed, noble titles do not always refer to a real place at all. At Prince Edward’s marriage in 1999, the queen created him Earl of Wessex, although the old kingdom of Wessex has had no political existence since 1066, and the name was all but forgotten until it was resurrected by Thomas Hardy as the setting of his novels. (This is perhaps but one of many ways in which the world of the aristocracy increasingly resembles the realm of literature.)

The king and queen	(These are all of the royal line.)
Prince and princess	

Duke and duchess	(These may or may not be of the royal line, but are ordinarily remote from the succession.)
Marquess and marchioness	
Earl and countess	
Viscount and viscountess	
Baron and baroness	
Baronet and lady	

Scottish peers sat in the parliament of Scotland, as English peers did in the parliament of England, till at the Act of Union (1707) Scottish peers were granted sixteen seats in the English House of Lords, to be filled by election. (In 1963, all Scottish lords were allowed to sit.) Similarly, Irish peers, when the Irish parliament was abolished in 1801, were granted the right to elect twenty-eight of their number to the House of Lords in Westminster. (Now that the Republic of Ireland is a separate nation, this no longer applies.) Women members (peeresses) were first allowed to sit in the House as nonhereditary Life Peers in 1958 (when that status was created for members of both genders); women first sat by their own hereditary right in 1963. Today the House of Lords still retains some power to influence or delay legislation, but its future is uncertain. In 1999, the hereditary peers (then amounting to 750) were reduced to 92

temporary members elected by their fellow peers. Holders of Life Peerages remain, as do senior bishops of the Church of England and high-court judges (the "Law Lords").

Below the peerage the chief title of honor is "knight." Knighthood, which is not hereditary, is generally a reward for services rendered. A knight (Sir John Black) is addressed, using his first name, as "Sir John"; his wife, using the last name, is "Lady Black"—unless she is the daughter of an earl or nobleman of higher rank, in which case she will be "Lady Arabella." The female equivalent of a knight bears the title of "Dame." Though the word *knight* itself comes from the Old English *cniht*, there is some doubt as to whether knighthood amounted to much before the arrival of the Normans. The feudal system required military service as a condition of land tenure, and a man who came to serve his king at the head of an army of tenants required a title of authority and badges of identity—hence the title of knighthood and the coat of arms. During the Crusades, when men were far removed from their land (or even sold it in order to go on crusade), more elaborate forms of fealty sprang up that soon expanded into orders of knighthood. The Templars, Hospitallers, Knights of the Teutonic Order, Knights of Malta, and Knights of the Golden Fleece were but a few of these companionships; not all of them were available at all times in England.

Gradually, with the rise of centralized government and the decline of feudal tenures, military knighthood became obsolete, and the rank largely honorific; sometimes, as under James I, it degenerated into a scheme of the royal government for making money. For hundreds of years after its establishment in the fourteenth century, the Order of the Garter was the only English order of knighthood, an exclusive courtly companionship. Then, during the late seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the nineteenth centuries, a number of additional orders were created, with names such as the Thistle, Saint Patrick, the Bath, Saint Michael, and Saint George, plus a number of special Victorian and Indian orders. They retain the terminology, ceremony, and dignity of knighthood, but the military implications are vestigial.

Although the British Empire now belongs to history, appointments to the Order of the British Empire continue to be conferred for services to that empire at home or abroad. Such honors (commonly referred to as "gongs") are granted by the monarch in New Year's and Birthday lists, but the decisions are now made by the government in power. In recent years there have been efforts to popularize and democratize the dispensation of honors, with recipients including celebrities of all types. But this does not prevent large sectors of British society from regarding both knighthood and the peerage as largely irrelevant to modern life.

# Religions in Great Britain

In the late sixth century C.E., missionaries from Rome introduced Christianity to Britons—actually, reintroduced it, since it had briefly flourished in the southern parts of the British Isles during the Roman occupation, and even after the Roman withdrawal had persisted in the Celtic regions of Scotland and Wales. By the time the earliest poems included in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* were composed (the seventh century), therefore, there had been a Christian presence in the British Isles for hundreds of years. The conversion of the Germanic occupiers of England can, however, be dated only from 597. Our knowledge of the religion of pre-Christian Britain is sketchy, but it is likely that vestiges of Germanic polytheism assimilated into, or coexisted with, the practice of Christianity: fertility rites were incorporated into the celebration of Easter resurrection, rituals commemorating the dead into All-Hallows Eve and All Saints Day, and elements of winter solstice festivals into the celebration of Christmas. The most durable polytheistic remains are the days of the week, each of which except “Saturday” derives from the name of a Germanic pagan god, and the word “Easter,” deriving, according to the great monastic scholar Bede (ca. 673–735), from the name of a Germanic pagan goddess, Eostre. In English literature such “folkloric” elements sometimes elicit romantic nostalgia. Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath” looks back to a magical time before the arrival of Christianity in which the land was “fulfild of fairye.” Hundreds of years later, the seventeenth-century writer Robert Herrick honors the amalgamation of Christian and pagan elements in agrarian British culture in such poems as “Corinna’s Gone A-Maying” and “The Hock Cart.”

Medieval Christianity was fairly uniform, if complex, across Western Europe—hence called “catholic,” or universally shared. The Church was composed of the so-called “regular” and “secular” orders, the regular orders being those who followed a rule in a

community under an abbot or an abbess (that is, monks, nuns, friars, and canons), while the secular clergy of priests served parish communities under the governance of a bishop. In the unstable period from the sixth until the twelfth century, monasteries were the intellectual powerhouse of the Church. From the beginning of the thirteenth century, with the development of an urban Christian spirituality in Europe, friars dominated the recently invented institution of universities, as well as devoting themselves, in theory at least, to the urban poor.

The Catholic Church was also an international power structure. With its hierarchy of pope, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, it offered a model of the centralized, bureaucratic state from the late eleventh century. That ecclesiastical power structure coexisted alongside a separate, often less centralized and feudal structure of lay authorities, with theoretically different and often competing spheres of social responsibilities. The sharing of lay and ecclesiastical authority in medieval England was sometimes a source of conflict. Chaucer's pilgrims are on their way to visit the memorial shrine to one victim of such exemplary struggle: Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, who opposed the policies of King Henry II, was assassinated by indirect suggestion of the king in 1170, and later made a saint. The Church, in turn, produced its own victims: Jews were subject to persecution in the late twelfth century in England, before being expelled in 1290. From the beginning of the fifteenth century, the English Church targeted Lollard heretics (see below) with capital punishment, for the first time.

As an international organization, the Church conducted its business in the universal language of Latin. Thus although in the period the largest segment of literate persons was made up of clerics, the clerical contribution to great literary writing in vernacular languages (for example, French and English) was, so far as we know, relatively modest, with some great exceptions in the later Middle Ages (for example, William Langland). Lay, vernacular writers of the period certainly reflect the importance of the Church as an institution and the pervasiveness of religion in the rituals that

marked everyday life, as well as contesting institutional authority. From the late fourteenth century, indeed, England witnessed an active and articulate, proto-Protestant movement known as Lollardy, which attacked clerical hierarchy and promoted vernacular scriptures.

Beginning in 1517 the German monk Martin Luther, in Wittenberg, Germany, openly challenged many aspects of Catholic practice and by 1520 had completely repudiated the authority of the pope, setting in motion the Protestant Reformation. Luther argued that the Roman Catholic Church had strayed far from the pattern of Christianity laid out in scripture. He rejected Catholic doctrines for which no biblical authority was to be found, such as the belief in Purgatory, and translated the Bible into German, on the grounds that the importance of scripture for all Christians made its translation into the vernacular tongue essential. Luther was not the first to advance such views—Lollard followers of the Englishman John Wycliffe had translated the Bible in the late fourteenth century. But Luther, protected by powerful German rulers, was able to speak out without fear of punishment and convert others to his views, rather than suffer the persecution usually meted out to heretics. Soon other reformers were following in Luther's footsteps: of these, the Swiss Ulrich Zwingli and the French Jean Calvin would be especially influential for English religious thought.

At first England remained staunchly Catholic. Its king, Henry VIII, was so severe to heretics that the pope awarded him the title "Defender of the Faith," which British monarchs have retained to this day. In 1534, however, Henry rejected the authority of the pope to prevent his divorce from his queen, Catherine of Aragon, and his marriage to his mistress, Ann Boleyn. In doing so, Henry appropriated to himself ecclesiastical as well as secular authority. Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, was executed in 1535 for refusing to endorse Henry's right to govern the English church. Over the following six years, Henry consolidated his grip on the ecclesiastical establishment by dissolving the powerful, populous Catholic monasteries and redistributing their massive landholdings to his own

lay followers. Yet Henry's church largely retained Catholic doctrine and liturgy. When Henry died and his young son, Edward, came to the throne in 1547, the English church embarked on a more Protestant path, a direction abruptly reversed when Edward died and his older sister Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, took the throne in 1553 and attempted to reintroduce Roman Catholicism. Mary's reign was also short, however, and her successor, Elizabeth I, the daughter of Ann Boleyn, was a Protestant. Elizabeth attempted to establish a "middle way" Christianity, compromising between Roman Catholic practices and beliefs and reformed ones.

The Church of England, though it laid claim to a national rather than pan-European authority, aspired like its predecessor to be the universal church of all English subjects. It retained the Catholic structure of parishes and dioceses and the Catholic hierarchy of bishops, though the ecclesiastical authority was now the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Church's "Supreme Governor" was the monarch. Yet disagreement and controversy persisted. Some members of the Church of England wanted to retain many of the ritual and liturgical elements of Catholicism. Others, the Puritans, advocated a more thoroughgoing reformation. Most Puritans remained within the Church of England, but a minority, the "Separatists" or "Congregationalists," split from the established church altogether. These dissenters no longer thought of the ideal church as an organization to which everybody belonged; instead, they conceived it as a more exclusive group of likeminded people, one not necessarily attached to a larger body of believers.

In the seventeenth century, the succession of the Scottish king James to the English throne produced another problem. England and Scotland were separate nations, and in the sixteenth century Scotland had developed its own national Presbyterian church, or "kirk," under the leadership of the reformer John Knox. The kirk retained fewer Catholic liturgical elements than did the Church of England, and its authorities, or "presbyters," were elected by assemblies of their fellow clerics, rather than appointed by the king. James I and his son Charles I, especially the latter, wanted to bring



the Scottish kirk into conformity with Church of England practices. The Scots violently resisted these efforts, with the collaboration of many English Puritans, in a conflict that eventually developed into the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. The effect of these disputes is visible in the poetry of such writers as John Milton, Robert Herrick, Henry Vaughan, and Thomas Traherne, and in the prose of Thomas Browne, Lucy Hutchinson, and Dorothy Waugh. Just as in the mid-sixteenth century, when a succession of monarchs with different religious commitments destabilized the church, so the seventeenth century endured spiritual whiplash. King Charles I's highly ritualistic Church of England was violently overturned by the Puritan victors in the Civil War—until 1660, after the death of the Puritan leader, Oliver Cromwell, when the Church of England was restored along with the monarchy.

The religious and political upheavals of the seventeenth century produced Christian sects that de-emphasized the ceremony of the established church and rejected as well its top-down authority structure. Some of these groups were ephemeral, but the Baptists (founded in 1608 in Amsterdam by the English expatriate John Smyth) and Quakers, or Society of Friends (founded by George Fox in the 1640s), flourished outside the established church, sometimes despite cruel persecution. John Bunyan, a Baptist, wrote the Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison. Some dissenters, like the Baptists, shared the reformed reverence for the absolute authority of scripture but interpreted the scriptural texts differently from their fellow Protestants. Others, like the Quakers, favored, even over the authority of the Bible, the "inner light" or voice of individual conscience, which they took to be the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals.

The Protestant dissenters were not England's only religious minorities. Despite crushing fines and the threat of imprisonment, a minority of Catholics under Elizabeth and James openly refused to give their allegiance to the new church, and others remained secret adherents to the old ways. John Donne was brought up in an ardently Catholic family, and several other writers converted to

Catholicism as adults—Ben Jonson for a considerable part of his career, Elizabeth Carey and Richard Crashaw permanently, and at profound personal cost. In the eighteenth century, Catholics remained objects of suspicion as possible agents of sedition, especially after the “Glorious Revolution” in 1688 deposed the Catholic James II in favor of the Protestant William and Mary. Anti-Catholic prejudice affected John Dryden, a Catholic convert, as well as the lifelong Catholic Alexander Pope. By contrast, the English colony of Ireland remained overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, the fervor of its religious commitment at least partly inspired by resistance to English occupation. Starting in the reign of Elizabeth, England shored up its own authority in Ireland by encouraging Protestant immigrants from Scotland to settle in the north of Ireland, producing a virulent religious divide the effects of which are still felt today.

A small community of Jews had moved from France to London after 1066, when the Norman William the Conqueror came to the English throne. Although despised and persecuted by many Christians, they were allowed to remain as moneylenders to the Crown, until the thirteenth century, when the king developed alternative sources of credit. At this point, in 1290, the Jews were expelled from England. In 1655 Oliver Cromwell permitted a few to return, and in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Jewish population slowly increased, mainly by immigration from Germany. In the mid-eighteenth century some prominent Jews had their children brought up as Christians so as to facilitate their full integration into English society: thus the nineteenth-century writer and politician Benjamin Disraeli, although he and his father were members of the Church of England, was widely considered a Jew insofar as his ancestry was Jewish.

In the late seventeenth century, as the Church of England reasserted itself, Catholics, Jews, and dissenting Protestants found themselves subject to significant legal restrictions. The Corporation Act, passed in 1661, and the Test Act, passed in 1673, excluded all who refused to take communion in the Church of England from

voting, attending university, or working in government or in the professions. Members of religious minorities, as well as Church of England communicants, paid mandatory taxes in support of Church of England ministers and buildings. In 1689 the dissenters gained the right to worship in public, but Jews and Catholics were not permitted to do so.

During the eighteenth century, political, intellectual, and religious history remained closely intertwined. The Church of England came to accommodate a good deal of variety. "Low church" services resembled those of the dissenting Protestant churches, minimizing ritual and emphasizing the sermon; the "high church" retained more elaborate ritual elements, yet its prestige was under attack on several fronts. Many Enlightenment thinkers subjected the Bible to rational critique and found it wanting: the philosopher David Hume, for instance, argued that the "miracles" described therein were more probably lies or errors than real breaches of the laws of nature. Within the Church of England, the "broad church" Latitudinarians welcomed this rationalism, advocating theological openness and an emphasis on ethics rather than dogma. More radically, the Unitarian movement rejected the divinity of Christ while professing to accept his ethical teachings. Taking a different tack, the preacher John Wesley, founder of Methodism, responded to the rationalists' challenge with a newly fervent call to evangelism and personal discipline; his movement was particularly successful in Wales. Revolutions in America and France at the end of the century generated considerable millenarian excitement and fostered more new religious ideas, often in conjunction with a radical social agenda. Many important writers of the Romantic period were indebted to traditions of protestant dissent: Unitarian and rationalist protestant ideas influenced William Hazlitt, Anna Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge. William Blake created a highly idiosyncratic poetic mythology loosely indebted to radical strains of Christian mysticism. Others were even more heterodox: Lord Byron and Robert Burns, brought up as Scots

Presbyterians, rebelled fiercely, and Percy Shelley's writing of an atheistic pamphlet resulted in his expulsion from Oxford.

Great Britain never erected an American-style "wall of separation" between church and state, but in practice religion and secular affairs grew more and more distinct during the nineteenth century. In consequence, members of religious minorities no longer seemed to pose a threat to the commonweal. A movement to repeal the Test Act failed in the 1790s, but a renewed effort resulted in the extension of the franchise to dissenting Protestants in 1828 and to Catholics in 1829. The numbers of Roman Catholics in England were swelled by immigration from Ireland, but there were also some prominent English adherents. Among writers, the converts John Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins are especially important. The political participation and social integration of Jews presented a thornier challenge. Lionel de Rothschild, repeatedly elected to represent London in Parliament during the 1840s and 1850s, was not permitted to take his seat there because he refused to take his oath of office "on the true faith of a Christian"; finally, in 1858, the Jewish Disabilities Act allowed him to omit these words. Only in 1871, however, were Oxford and Cambridge opened to non-Anglicans.

Meanwhile geological discoveries and Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories increasingly cast doubt on the literal truth of the Creation story, and close philological analysis of the biblical text suggested that its origins were human rather than divine. By the end of the nineteenth century, many writers were bearing witness to a world in which Christianity no longer seemed fundamentally plausible. In his poetry and prose, Thomas Hardy depicts a world devoid of benevolent providence. Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is in part an elegy to lost spiritual assurance, as the "Sea of Faith" goes out like the tide: "But now I only hear / Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar / Retreating." For Arnold, literature must replace religion as a source of spiritual truth, and intimacy between individuals substitute for the lost communal solidarity of the universal church.

The work of many twentieth-century writers shows the influence of a religious upbringing or a religious conversion in adulthood. T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden embrace Anglicanism, William Butler Yeats spiritualism. James Joyce repudiates Irish Catholicism but remains obsessed with it. Yet religion, or lack of it, is a matter of individual choice and conscience, not social or legal mandate. Over the past several decades, church attendance has plummeted in Great Britain. Only about 46 percent of the population identified itself as “Christian” on the 2021 census. Meanwhile, immigration from former British colonies as well as other countries has swelled the ranks of religions once uncommon in the British Isles—Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist—though the numbers of adherents remain small relative to the total population.

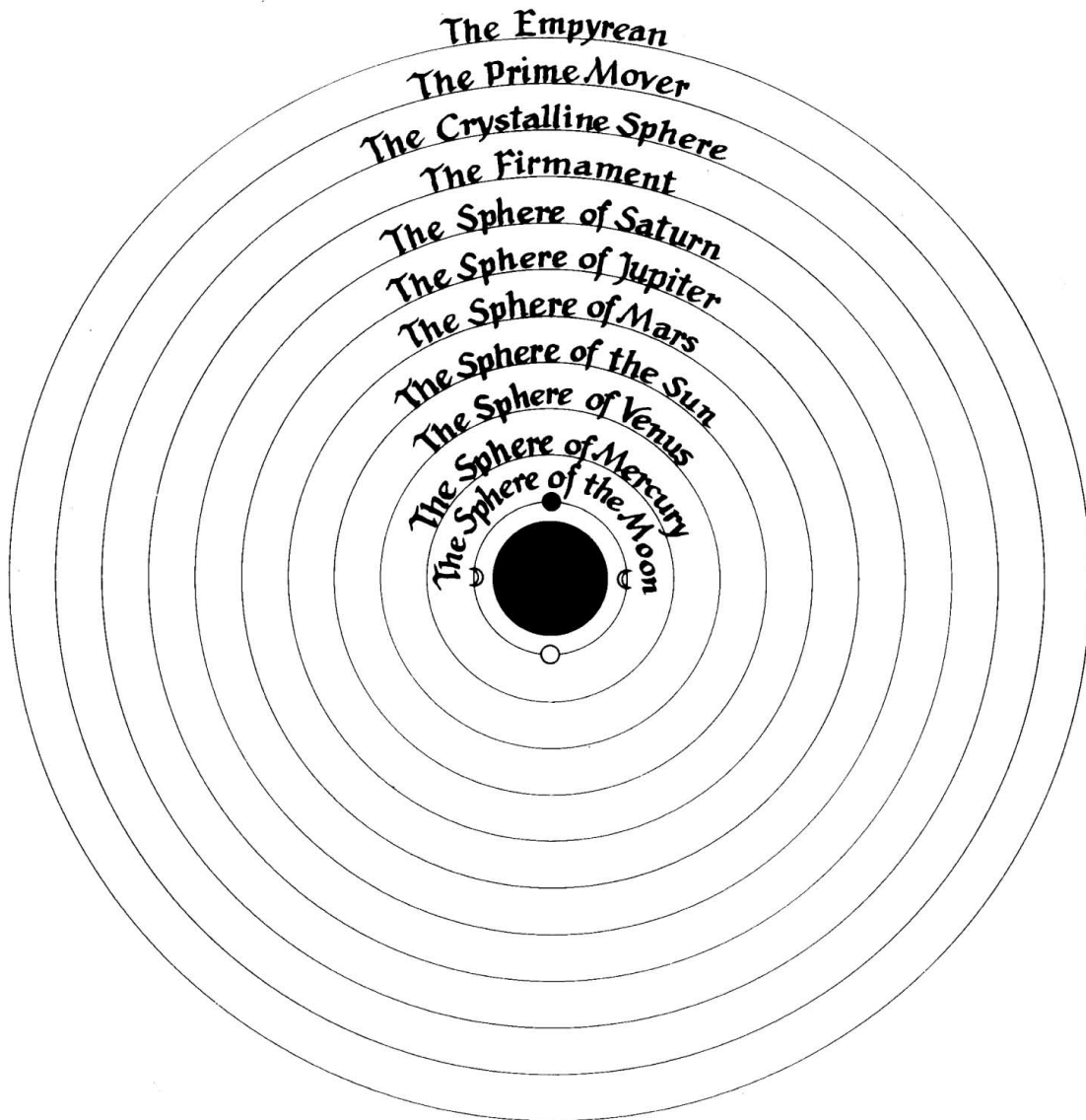
# The Universe According to Ptolemy

Ptolemy was a Roman astronomer of Greek descent, born in Egypt during the second century C.E.; for nearly fifteen hundred years after his death his account of the design of the universe was accepted as standard. During that time, the basic pattern underwent many detailed modifications and was fitted out with many astrological and pseudoscientific trappings. But in essence Ptolemy's followers portrayed the earth as the center of the universe, with the sun, planets, and fixed stars set in transparent spheres orbiting around it. In this scheme of things, as modified for Christian usage, Hell was usually placed under the earth's surface at the center of the cosmic globe, while Heaven, the abode of the blessed spirits, was in the outermost, uppermost circle, the empyrean. But in 1543 the Polish astronomer Copernicus proposed an alternative hypothesis—that the earth rotates around the sun, not vice versa; and despite theological opposition, observations with the new telescope and careful mathematical calculations insured ultimate acceptance of the new view.

The map of the Ptolemaic universe below is a simplified version of a diagram in Peter Apian's *Cosmography* (1584). In such a diagram, the Firmament is the sphere that contained the fixed stars; the Crystalline Sphere, which contained no heavenly bodies, is a late innovation, included to explain certain anomalies in the observed movement of the heavenly bodies; and the Prime Mover is the sphere that, itself put into motion by God, imparts rotation around the earth to all the other spheres.

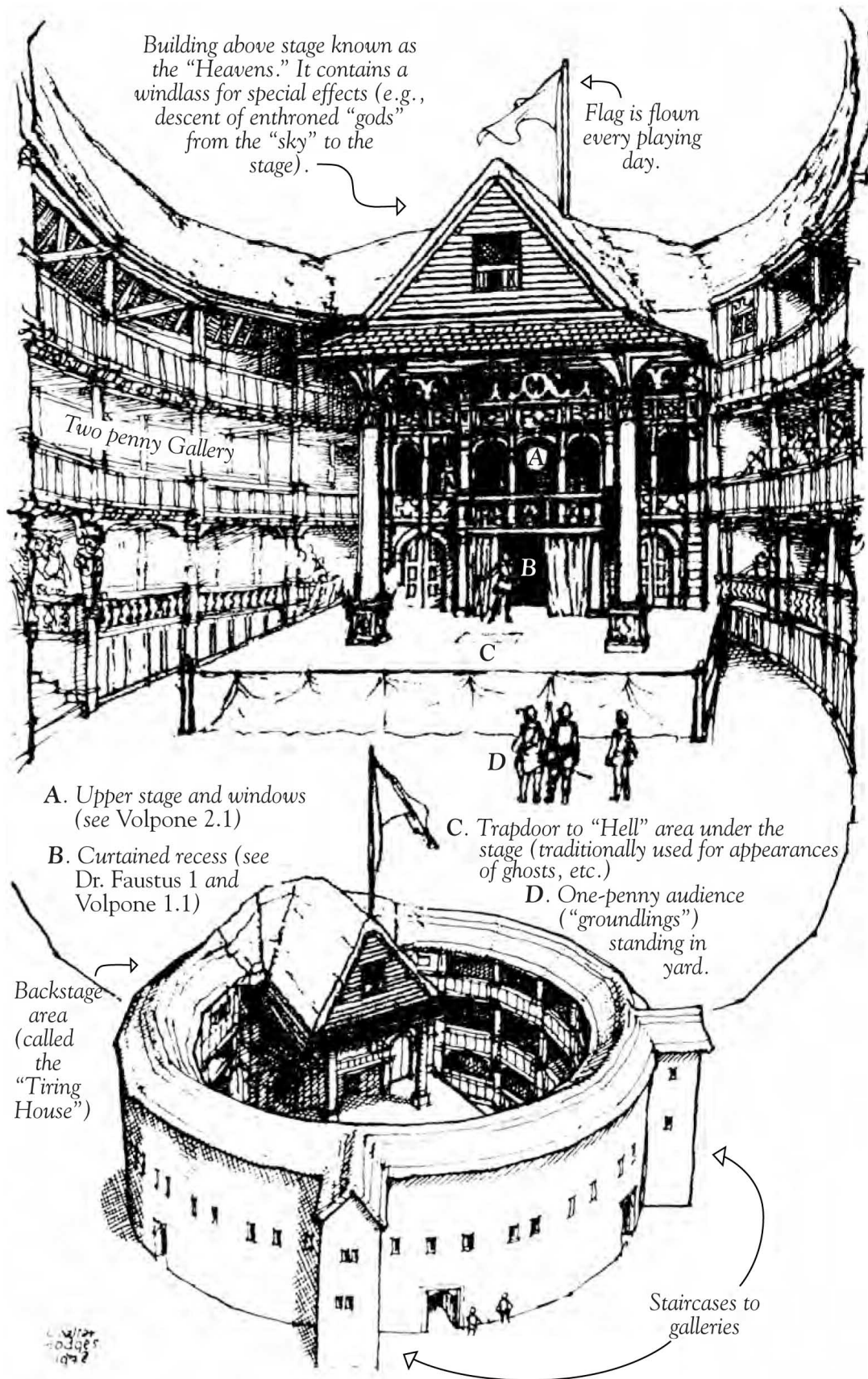
Milton, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, used two universes. The Copernican universe, though he alludes to it, was too large, formless, and unfamiliar to be the setting for the war between Heaven and Hell in *Paradise Lost*. He therefore used the Ptolemaic cosmos, but placed Heaven well outside this smaller earth-centered

universe, Hell far beneath it, and assigned the vast middle space to Chaos.



# **A LONDON PLAYHOUSE OF SHAKESPEARE'S TIME**







# **Volume C: The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century**

# General Bibliography

This bibliography consists of a list of suggested general readings on English literature. Bibliographies for the authors and topical clusters in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* are available online at the NAEL student site.

# Histories of England and of English Literature

Even the most distinguished of the comprehensive general histories written in past generations have come to seem outmoded.

Innovative research in social, cultural, and political history has made it difficult to write a single coherent account of England from the Middle Ages to the present, let alone to accommodate in a unified narrative the complex histories of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the other nations where writing in English has flourished. Readers who wish to explore the historical matrix out of which the works of literature collected in this anthology emerged are advised to consult the studies of particular periods listed in the appropriate sections of this bibliography. The multivolume *Oxford History of England* (1934–65) and *New Oxford History of England* (1992–2009) are useful, as are the three-volume *Peoples of the British Isles: A New History*, by Stanford E. Lehmberg, Samantha A. Meigs, and Thomas William Heyck (3rd ed., 1992); the nine-volume *Cambridge Cultural History of Britain*, ed. Boris Ford (1992); the three-volume *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950*, ed. F. M. L. Thompson (1990); and the multivolume *Penguin History of Britain*, gen. ed. David Cannadine (1996–). For Britain's imperial history, readers can consult the five-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (1998–99), as well as *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (2004). Also of interest is Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015). Given the cultural centrality of London, readers may find particular interest in *The London Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ben Weinreb et al. (3rd ed., 2008); Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (1994); and Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: "A Human Awful Wonder of God"* (2007) and *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (2001).

Similar observations may be made about literary history. In the light of such initiatives as women's studies, New Historicism, and postcolonialism, the range of authors deemed significant has expanded, along with the geographical and conceptual boundaries of literature in English. Attempts to capture in a unified account the great sweep of literature from *Beowulf* to the early twenty-first century have largely given way to studies of individual genres, carefully delimited time periods, and specific authors. Among the large-scale literary surveys, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. Dominic Head (3rd ed., 2006), is useful, as is the nine-volume *Penguin History of Literature* (1987–94) and the multivolume *Oxford History of Poetry in English* (2022–). *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Virginia Blain, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements (1990), is an important resource, and the editorial materials in the two-volume *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (3rd ed., 2007), constitute a concise history and set of biographies of women authors since the Middle Ages. *Annals of English Literature, 1475–1950* (2nd ed., 1961), lists important publications year by year, together with the significant literary events for each year. Seven volumes have been published in *The Oxford English Literary History*, gen. eds. Jonathan Bate and Colin Burrow (2002–): Laura Ashe, *1000–1350: Conquest and Transformation*; James Simpson, *1350–1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution*; Margaret J. M. Ezell, *1645–1714: The Later Seventeenth Century*; Philip Davis, *1830–1880: The Victorians*; Chris Baldick, *1830–1880: The Modern Movement (1910–1940)*; Randall Stevenson, *1960–2000: The Last of England?*; and Bruce King, *1948–2000: The Internationalization of English Literature*. See also *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (1999); *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare E. Lees (2013); *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (2002); *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, ed. John Richetti (2005); *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (2009);

*The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (2012); and *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (2004).

Helpful treatments and surveys of English meter, rhyme, and stanza forms are Paul Fussell Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (rev. ed., 1979); Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme: Device and Modernity* (1980); Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (1980); Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (1995); Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide* (1998); *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, ed. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland (2000); John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (3rd ed., 2001); *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, ed. Helen Vendler (3rd ed., 2010); *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (2014); and Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (2015).

On the development and functioning of the novel as a form, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1970; trans. 1980); *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (2000); *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (2 vols.; 2001–03, trans. 2006); McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (15th anniversary ed., 2002); *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (2012); *A Companion to the English Novel*, ed. Stephen Arata et al. (2015); and the ten volumes to date of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2012–). On women novelists and readers, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987), and Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (1994).

On the history of playhouse design, see Richard Leacroft, *The Development of the English Playhouse: An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building in England from Medieval to Modern Times* (1988). For a survey of the plays that have appeared on these and other

stages, see Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama*, rev. J. C. Trewin (6th ed., 1978); the eight-volume *The Revels History of Drama in English*, gen. eds. Clifford Leech and T. W. Craik (1975–83); Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum and Sylvia Wagonheim (3rd ed., 1989); and the three volumes of *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Jane Milling, Peter Thomson, Joseph Donohue, and Baz Kershaw (2004).

On some of the key intellectual currents that are at once reflected in and shaped by literature and contemporary literary criticism, Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic studies *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) and *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948) remain valuable, along with such works as Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900; trans. 1907; 3rd enl. ed., 2004); Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (4 vols., 1923–95; trans. 1953–96); Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (2 vols., 1939; trans. 1979–82); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (2 vols., 1949; trans. 1953, new trans. 2009); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; trans. 1957, new trans. 2008); Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957; new eds. 1997, 2016); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; 2nd ed., 1998); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958; trans. 1969, new ed. 1994); Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (1960; rev. ed., 1964; rev. and expanded as *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, 2003); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966; trans. 1983); M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (1971); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964; trans. 1965) and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; trans. 1970); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967; trans. 1976, 40th anniversary ed. 2016) and *Dissemination* (1972; trans. 1981); Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (1973); Hayden



White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973); Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973; trans. 1975); Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976; new ed., 2015); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979; trans. 1984); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979; 39th anniversary ed., 2009); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980; trans. 1987); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2 vols., 1980; trans. 1984–98); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1985; trans. 1987); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997); Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. Neil Hertz (1997); and N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999).

## Reference Works

The single most important tool for the study of literature in English is the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1884–1924; 2nd ed., 1989; 3rd ed. in process). The most current edition, updated quarterly, is available online to subscribers. The *OED* is written on historical principles: that is, it attempts not only to describe current word use but also to record the history and development of the language from its origins before the Norman Conquest to the present. It thus provides, for familiar as well as archaic and obscure words, the widest possible range of meanings and uses, organized chronologically and illustrated with quotations. The *OED* can be searched as a conventional dictionary arranged a–z and also by subject, usage, region, origin, and timeline (the first appearance of a word). Resources available for early forms of English include the online Old English and Middle English dictionaries at Lexilogos ([https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english\\_old.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_old.htm) and [https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english\\_middle.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_middle.htm)); also valuable are the *Dictionary of Old English* (1986–) and the *Middle English Dictionary* (1952; digitized 2008). Beyond the *OED* there are many other valuable dictionaries, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary* (5th ed., 50th anniversary printing, 2018); *The Oxford Dictionary of Abbreviations* (1992); T. F. Hoad, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1993); Bas Aarts, Sylvia Chalker, and Edmund Weiner, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (2nd ed., 2014); Morton S. Freeman, *A New Dictionary of Eponyms* (1997); *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English* (1999); *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms*, ed. Judith Siefring (2nd ed., 2004); P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (3rd ed., 2014); Tom McArthur, *The Oxford Guide to World English* (2002); and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, ed. Jennifer Speake (4th ed., 2003). Other valuable reference works include *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, ed. David Crystal

(3rd ed., 2018); *The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. Tom McArthur (1998); *Fowler's Concise Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, ed. Jeremy Butterfield (3rd ed., 2016); and the numerous guides to specialized vocabularies, slang, regional dialects, and the like.

There is a steady flow of new editions of most major and many minor writers in English, along with the publication of critical appraisals and scholarship. James L. Harner's *Literary Research Guide: An Annotated List of Reference Sources in English Literary Studies* (6th ed., 2014; available online at [www.mla.org/public](http://www.mla.org/public)) offers thorough, evaluative annotations of a wide range of sources. For the historical record of scholarship and critical discussion, *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. George Watson (5 vols., 1969–77), and the third edition in process, *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. Joanne Shattock (1 vol. to date, 2000–), are useful. The *MLA International Bibliography* (also online) is a key resource for following critical discussion of literatures in English. Ranging from 1926 to the present, it includes journal articles, essays, chapters from collections, books, and dissertations, and covers folklore, linguistics, and film. The *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (ABELL)*, compiled by the Modern Humanities Research Association, lists monographs, periodical articles, critical editions of literary works, book reviews, and collections of essays published anywhere in the world; unpublished doctoral dissertations are covered for the period 1920–99 (available online to subscribers directly and as part of Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>).

For compact biographies of English authors, see the multivolume *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (2004); since 2004 the *DNB* has been extended online with updates (now monthly). Handy reference books of authors, works, and various literary terms and allusions include many volumes in the *Cambridge Companion* and *Oxford Companion* series: e.g., *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (2007); *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed.

Dinah Birch (7th ed., 2009); and *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter Struck (2010). *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, editor-in-chief Roland Greene (4th ed., 2012), is available online to subscribers in Oxford Reference. Handbooks that define and illustrate literary concepts and terms include *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. J. A. Cuddon and M. A. R. Habib (5th ed., 2015); William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature* (12th ed., 2011); *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (2nd ed., 1995); and M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (11th ed., 2014). Also useful are Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (2nd ed., 1991); Arthur Quinn, *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase* (1982); the *Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (1995); and George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (1994).

On Greek and Roman backgrounds, see *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*—vol. 1, *Greek Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and Bernard M. W. Knox (1985), and vol. 2, *Latin Literature*, ed. E. J. Kenney and W. V. Clausen (1982), both available to subscribers online; *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M. C. Howatson (3rd ed., 2011); Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (1987; trans. 1994); *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow (4th ed., 2012); Richard Rutherford, *Classical Literature: A Concise History* (2005); and Mark P. O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology* (11th ed., 2018). The Loeb Classical Library of Greek and Roman texts with facing-page English translations is now available online to subscribers at [www.loebclassics.com](http://www.loebclassics.com).

Digital resources in the humanities continue to grow rapidly. Among the many useful electronic resources for the study of English literature are enormous digital archives, available to subscribers: Early English Books Online (EEBO), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>; Literature Online,

<http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>; and Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), [www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online](http://www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online). There are also numerous free sites of variable quality. Many of the best of these are period- or author-specific and hence are listed in the period/author bibliographies on the NAEL website. Among the general sites, one of the most useful and wide-ranging is Voice of the Shuttle (<http://vos.ucsb.edu>), which includes links to Bartleby.com and Project Gutenberg.

# Literary Criticism and Theory

*The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* comprises nine volumes (1989–2013): *Classical Criticism*, ed. George A. Kennedy; *The Middle Ages*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson; *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton; *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson; *Romanticism*, ed. Marshall Brown; *The Nineteenth Century, c. 1830–1914*, ed. M. A. R. Habib; *Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey; *From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. Raman Selden; and *Twentieth-Century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris. See also M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953); William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957); René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* (8 vols., 1955–92); Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (1980); J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature* (2002); and John Frow, *Character and Person* (2014). Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker have written *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (6th ed., 2017). Other useful resources include *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth, and Imre Szeman (2nd ed., 2005); *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, gen. ed. Vincent B. Leitch (3rd ed., 2018).

Modern approaches to English literature and literary theory were shaped by certain landmark works: William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; 3rd ed., 1953), *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), and *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951; 3rd ed., 1977); T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1932; 3rd ed., 1951) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957); F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936) and *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948); Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The*

*Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946; trans. 1953); Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950); William K. Wimsatt Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; 2nd ed., 1983); and W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1970). René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3rd ed., 1963), is a useful introduction to the variety of scholarly and critical approaches to literature up to the time of its publication. Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed., 2011), discusses recurrent issues and debates. On the discipline of criticism, see John Guillory's *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (2022); Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) is a critical assessment of contemporary criticism.

Beginning in the late 1960s, interest in literary theory as a specific field markedly intensified. Certain forms of literary study had already been influenced by the work of the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson and the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky—and, still more, by conceptions that derived or claimed to derive from Marx and Engels—but the full impact of these theories was not felt until what became known as the “theory revolution” of the 1970s and ’80s. For Marxist literary criticism, see Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1920; trans. 1971), *The Historical Novel* (1937; trans. 1962), and *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki, and Others* (trans. 1950); Walter Benjamin's essays from the 1920s and ’30s, represented in *Illuminations* (1955; trans. 1968) and *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1975; trans. 1978); Mikhail Bakhtin's essays from the 1930s represented in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. 1981) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965; trans. 1968); *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1971); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (1977);

Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (1979; 2nd ed., 2003); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981); and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983; anniversary ed., 2008) and *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990).

Structural linguistics and anthropology gave rise to a flowering of structuralist literary criticism; convenient introductions include Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (1974), and Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (new ed., 2002). Poststructuralist challenges to this approach are epitomized in such influential works as Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (1967; trans. 1978), and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971; 2nd ed., 1983). Poststructuralism is discussed in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982; 25th anniversary ed., 2007); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991); John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (1991); and *Beyond Structuralism: The Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading*, ed. Wendell V. Harris (1996). A figure who greatly influenced both structuralism and poststructuralism is Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies* (1957; trans. 1972, new trans. 2012) and *S/Z* (1970; trans. 1974). Among other influential contributions to literary theory are the psychoanalytic approach in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973; 2nd ed., 1997), and the reader-response approach in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980). For a retrospect on these decades, see Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (2003).

Influenced by these theoretical currents but not restricted to them, modern feminist literary criticism was fashioned by such works as Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (1975); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (1976; new ed., 1986); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to*



*Lessing* (1977; expanded ed., 1999); and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Subsequent studies include Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977; trans. 1985); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987; new ed., 2006); Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (1987); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (3 vols., 1988–94); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; 2nd ed., 1999); and the critical views sampled in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (1985); *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Mary Eagleton (1986; 3rd ed., 2011); and *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (1991; rev. in 2009 as *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*); *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (1994); *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (2006); and *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2007).

Just as feminist critics used poststructuralist and psychoanalytic methods to place literature in conversation with gender theory, a new school emerged placing literature in conversation with critical race theory. Comprehensive introductions include *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (1995); and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Stephen M. Caliendo and Charlton D. McIlwain (2nd ed., 2021). For an important precursor in cultural studies, see Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978; 2nd ed., 2013). Seminal works include Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988; 25th anniversary ed., 2014); Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and*

*Rights* (1991); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (1993; 25th anniversary ed., 2017); Gene Andrew Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature* (2011); Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (2017); and Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019). Other important works include Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (2008; rpt. 2017); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016); and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018). Helpful anthologies and collections of essays have emerged in recent decades, such as *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris (1997), and also their *Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (2001); *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (1996; updated 2003); *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher and Michael P. Kramer (2003); *A Companion to African American Literature*, ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett (2010); *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (2011); *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*, ed. Suzanne Bost and Frances R. Aparicio (2013); *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (2014); *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (2015); and *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature, 1945–2010*, ed. Deirdre Osborne (2016).

Gay literature and queer studies are represented in collections including *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (1991); *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (1993); *The Columbia*

*Anthology of Gay Literature: Readings from Western Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Byrne R. S. Fone (1998); *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (2014); and *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd (2015), and by such books as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985; 30th anniversary ed., 2015) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990; updated ed., 2008); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (1989); Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (1995); Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (1998); David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (2002); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007); and Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis* (2016).

New Historicism is represented in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1990; new ed., 2007); *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (1993); *The New Historicism Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (1994); and Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (2000). The related social and historical dimension of texts is discussed in Jerome McGann, *Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983), and *Scholarly Editing: A Guide to Research*, ed. D. C. Greetham (1995). Characteristic of New Historicism is an expansion of the field of literary interpretation still further in cultural studies; for a broad sampling of the range of interests, see *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (1992); *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (1995); and *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (3rd ed., 2007).

This expansion of the field is similarly reflected in postcolonial studies: see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (cited above)

and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; trans. 1963, 60th anniversary ed. 2021); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993); *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (1990); *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2nd ed., 2006); and such influential books as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989; 2nd ed., 2002); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995; 2nd ed., 2005); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000; new ed., 2008); and Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001; anniversary ed., 2016). Useful collections include *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (2 vols., 2011–12); *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. Ato Quayson (2016); and *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*, ed. Jahan Ramazani (2017).

In the wake of the theory revolution, critics have focused on a wide array of topics, which can be only briefly surveyed here. One current of work, focusing on the history of emotion, is represented in Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2005); *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010); and Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (2015). A somewhat related current, examining the special role of traumatic memory in literature, is exemplified in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (1995), and Dominic LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001; new ed., 2014). Work on the literary implications of cognitive science may be glimpsed in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (2010). Interest in quantitative approaches to literature was sparked by Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2005). For the field of digital humanities, see Moretti, *Distant Reading* (2013); *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, ed. Melissa Terras, Julianne Nyhan, and Edward Vanhoutte (2013); and *A New Companion to*

*Digital Humanities*, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (2016). For ecocriticism, or studies of literature and the environment, see *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996); *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (1998); Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (2000); Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005); Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011); *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (2014); and *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, ed. Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (2017). Related are the fields of animal studies and posthumanism, whose key works include Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991; trans. 1993); Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (2000); Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003) and *What Is Posthumanism?* (2009); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2006; trans. 2008); Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012); *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely (2012); and *Critical Animal Studies: Thinking the Unthinkable*, ed. John Sorenson (2014). The relationship between literature and law is central to such works as *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader*, ed. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailloux (1988); *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, ed. Peter Brooks and Paul Gewirtz (1996); *Literature and Legal Problem Solving: Law and Literature as Ethical Discourse*, ed. Paul J. Heald (1998); and *New Directions in Law and Literature*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Bernadette Meyler (2017). Ethical questions in literature have been usefully explored by, among others, Geoffrey Galt Harpham in *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (1992) and Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). Finally, some approaches to literature, such as formalism and literary

biography, that seemed superseded in the theoretical ferment of the late twentieth century have had a resurgence. A renewed interest in form is evident in Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002); *Reading for Form*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (2006); and Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015). Interest in the history of the book was spearheaded by D. F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1986), Jerome J. McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991), and Roger Chartier's *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1992; trans. 1994). See also *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (1996); *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (7 vols., 1999–2019); *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (2nd ed., 2006); and *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Leslie Howsam (2015). For studies in new media and digital or electronic literature, see N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008); Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (2016); and Jessica Pressman's *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (2020).

Anthologies representing a range of recent approaches include *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge with Nigel Wood (2nd ed., 2000); *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (4th ed., 1998); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (cited above).

# Literary Terminology\*

Using simple technical terms can sharpen our understanding and streamline our discussion of literary works. Some terms, such as the ones in section A, below, help us address the internal style, structure, form, and kind of works. Other terms, such as those in section B, provide insight into the material forms in which literary works have been produced.

In analyzing what they called “rhetoric,” ancient Greek and Roman writers determined the elements of what we call “style” and “structure.” Most of our literary terms are derived, via medieval and Renaissance intermediaries, from the Greek and Latin sources. In the definitions that follow, the etymology, or root, of the word is given when it helps illuminate the word’s current usage.

Many of the examples are drawn from texts in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.

Words **boldfaced** within definitions are themselves defined in this appendix. Some terms are defined within definitions; such words are *italicized*.

## Endnotes

- Note \*: This appendix was devised and compiled by James Simpson with the collaboration of all the editors. We especially thank Professor Lara Bovilsky of the University of Oregon at Eugene for her help. [Return to reference \\*](#)

## A. Terms of Style, Structure, Form, and Kind

**accent** (synonym "stress"): a term of **rhythm**. The special force devoted to the voicing of one syllable in a word over others. In the noun "accent," for example, the accent, or stress, is on the first syllable.

**act**: the major subdivision of a play, usually divided into **scenes**.

**aesthetics** (from Greek, "to feel, apprehend by the senses"): the philosophy of artistic meaning as a distinct mode of apprehending untranslatable truth, defined as an alternative to rational enquiry, which is purely abstract. Developed in the late eighteenth century by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant especially.

**Alexandrine**: a term of **meter**. In French verse a line of twelve syllables, and, by analogy, in English verse a line of six stresses. See **hexameter**.

**a llegory** (Greek "saying otherwise"): saying one thing (the "vehicle" of the allegory) and meaning another (the allegory's "tenor"). Allegories may be momentary aspects of a work, as in **metaphor** ("John is a lion"), or, through extended metaphor, may constitute the basis of narrative, as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: this second meaning is the dominant one. See also **symbol** and **type**. Allegory is one of the most significant **figures of thought**.

**a lliteration** (from Latin "litera," alphabetic letter): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of an initial consonant sound or consonant cluster in consecutive or closely positioned words. This pattern is often an inseparable part of the meter in Germanic languages, where the tonic, or accented **syllable**, is usually the first syllable.



Thus all Old English poetry and some varieties of Middle English poetry use alliteration as part of their basic metrical practice. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 1: "Once the siege and assault of Troy had ceased" (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)). Otherwise used for local effects; Stevie Smith, "Pretty," lines 4–5: "And in the pretty pool the pike stalks / He stalks his prey . . ." (see vol. F, [p. 589](#)).

**allusion:** Literary allusion is a passing but illuminating reference within a literary text to another, well-known text (often biblical or **classical**). Topical allusions are also, of course, common in certain modes, especially **satire**.

**anagnorisis** (Greek "recognition"): the moment of **protagonist's** recognition in a narrative, which is also often the moment of moral understanding.

**anapest:** a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two unstressed (uu) syllables followed by one stressed (/). Thus, for example, "Illinois."

**anaphora** (Greek "carrying back"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of words or groups of words at the beginning of consecutive sentences, clauses, or phrases. Blake, "London," lines 5–8: "In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban . . ." (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)); Louise Bennett, "Jamaica Oman," lines 17–20: "Some backa man a push, some side-a / Man a hole him han, / Some a lick sense eena him head, / Some a guide him pon him plan!" (see vol. F, [p. 724](#)).

**a nimal fable:** a **genre**. A short narrative of speaking animals, followed by moralizing comment, written in a low style and gathered into a collection. Robert Henryson, "The Cock and the Jasper" (see vol. A, [p. 679](#)).

**a ntithesis** (Greek "placing against"): a **figure of thought**. The juxtaposition of opposed terms in clauses or sentences that are next to or near each other. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.777–80: "They but now

who seemed / In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons / Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room / Throng numberless" (see vol. B, p. 1448).

**a postrophe** (from Greek "turning away"): a **figure of thought**.

An address, often to an absent person, a force, or a quality. For example, a poet makes an apostrophe to a Muse when invoking her for inspiration.

**apposition:** a term of **syntax**. The repetition of elements serving an identical grammatical function in one sentence. The effect of this repetition is to arrest the flow of the sentence, but in doing so to add extra semantic nuance to repeated elements. This is an especially important feature of Old English poetic style. See, for example, Caedmon's *Hymn* (vol. A, [p. 31](#)), where the phrases "heaven-kingdom's Guardian," "the Measurer's might," "his mind-plans," and "the work of the Glory-Father" each serve an identical syntactic function as the direct objects of "praise."

**a ssonance** (Latin "sounding to"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical or near identical stressed vowel sounds in words whose final consonants differ, producing half-rhyme. Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott," line 100: "His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed" (see vol. E, [p. 210](#)).

**a ubade** (originally from Spanish "alba," dawn): a **genre**. A lover's dawn song or lyric bewailing the arrival of the day and the necessary separation of the lovers; Donne, "The Sun Rising" (see vol. B, [p. 888](#)). Larkin recasts the genre in "Aubade" (see vol. F, [p. 795](#)).

**a utobiography** (Greek "self-life writing"): a **genre**. A narrative of a life written by the subject; Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)). There are subgenres, such as the spiritual autobiography, narrating the author's path to conversion and subsequent spiritual trials, as in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*.

**ballad stanza:** a **verse form**. Usually a **quatrain** in alternating **iambic tetrameter** and **iambic trimeter** lines, rhyming abcb. See "Sir Patrick Spens" (vol. D, p. 38 ); Louise Bennett's poems (vol. F, [pp. 719–24](#)); Eliot, "Sweeney among the Nightingales" (vol. F, p. 501 ); Larkin, "This Be The Verse" (vol. F, p. 795 ).

**ballade:** a **verse form**. A form consisting usually of three stanzas followed by a four-line envoi (French, "send off"). The last line of the first stanza establishes a **refrain**, which is repeated, or subtly varied, as the last line of each stanza. The form was derived from French medieval poetry; English poets, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries especially, used it with varying stanza forms. Chaucer, "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse" (see vol. A, [p. 575](#)).

**bathos** (Greek "depth"): a **figure of thought**. A sudden and sometimes ridiculous descent of tone; Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* 3.157–58: "Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast, / When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last" (see vol. C, [p. 549](#)).

**beast epic:** a **genre**. A continuous, unmoralized narrative, in prose or verse, relating the victories of the wholly unscrupulous but brilliant strategist Reynard the Fox over all adversaries. Chaucer arouses, only to deflate, expectations of the genre in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 556](#)).

**biography** (Greek "life-writing"): a **genre**. A life as the subject of an extended narrative.

**blank verse:** a **verse form**. Unrhymed **iambic pentameter** lines. Blank verse has no stanzas, but is broken up into uneven units (verse paragraphs) determined by sense rather than form. First devised in English by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in his translation of two books of Virgil's *Aeneid*, this very flexible verse type became the standard form for dramatic poetry in the seventeenth century, as in most of Shakespeare's plays. Milton and Wordsworth, among

many others, also used it to create an English equivalent to **classical epic**.

**blazon**: strictly, a heraldic shield; in rhetorical usage, a **topos** whereby the individual elements of a beloved's face and body are singled out for **hyperbolic** admiration. Spenser, *Epithalamion*, lines 167–84 (see vol. B, [p. 459](#)). For an inversion of the **topos**, see Shakespeare, Sonnet 130 (vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**burlesque** (French and Italian "mocking"): a work that adopts the **conventions** of a genre with the aim less of comically mocking the genre than of satirically mocking the society so represented (see **satire**). Thus Pope's *Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)) does not mock **classical epic** so much as contemporary mores.

**caesura** (Latin "cut") (plural "caesurae"): a term of **meter**. A pause or breathing space within a line of verse, generally occurring between syntactic units; Louise Bennett, "Colonization in Reverse," lines 5–8: "By de hundred, by de tousan, / From country an from town, / By de ship-load, by de plane-load, / Jamaica is Englan boun" (see vol. F, [p. 722](#)), where the caesurae occur in lines 5 and 7.

**canon** (Greek "rule"): the group of texts regarded as worthy of special respect or attention by a given institution. Also, the group of texts regarded as definitely having been written by a certain author.

**catastrophe** (Greek "overturning"): the decisive turn in **tragedy** by which the plot is resolved and, usually, the **protagonist** dies.

**catharsis** (Greek "cleansing"): According to Aristotle, the effect of **tragedy** on its audience, through their experience of pity and terror, was a kind of spiritual cleansing, or catharsis.

**character** (Greek "stamp, impression"): a person, personified animal, or other figure represented in a literary work, especially in narrative and drama. The more a character seems to generate the action of a narrative, and the less he or she seems merely to serve a

preordained narrative pattern, the “fuller,” or more “rounded,” a character is said to be. A “stock” character, common particularly in many comic genres, will perform a predictable function in different works of a given genre.

**chiasmus** (Greek “crosswise”): a **figure of speech**. The inversion of an already established sequence. This can involve verbal echoes: Pope, “Eloisa to Abelard,” line 104, “The crime was common, common be the pain” (see vol. C, [p. 560](#)); or it can be purely a matter of syntactic inversion: Pope, *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, line 8: “They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide” (see vol. C, [p. 575](#)).

**classical, classicism, classic**: Each term can be widely applied, but in English literary discourse, “classical” primarily describes the works of either Greek or Roman antiquity. “Classicism” denotes the practice of art forms inspired by classical antiquity, in particular the observance of rhetorical norms of **decorum** and balance, as opposed to following the dictates of untutored inspiration, as in Romanticism. “Classic” denotes an especially famous work within a given **canon**.

**climax** (Greek “ladder”): a moment of great intensity and structural change, especially in drama. Also a **figure of speech** whereby a sequence of verbally linked clauses is made, in which each successive clause is of greater consequence than its predecessor. Bacon, *Of Studies*: “Studies serve for pastimes, for ornaments, and for abilities. Their chief use for pastimes is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in judgement” (see vol. B, pp. 1167–68).

**comedy**: a **genre**. A term primarily applied to drama, and derived from ancient drama, in opposition to **tragedy**. Comedy deals with humorously confusing, sometimes ridiculous situations in which the ending is, nevertheless, happy. A comedy often ends in one or more marriages.

**comic mode:** Many genres (for example, **romance**, **fabliau**, **comedy**) involve a happy ending in which justice is done, the ravages of time are arrested, and that which is lost is found. Such genres participate in a comic mode.

**connotation:** To understand connotation, we need to understand **denotation**. While many words can denote the same concept—that is, have the same basic meaning—those words can evoke different associations, or connotations. Contrast, for example, the clinical-sounding term “depression” and the more colorful, musical, even poetic phrase “the blues.”

**consonance** (Latin “sounding with”): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of final consonants in words or stressed syllables whose vowel sounds are different. Herbert, “Easter,” line 13: “Consort, both heart and lute . . .” (see vol. B, p. 1183).

**convention:** a repeatedly recurring feature (in either form or content) of works, occurring in combination with other recurring formal features, which constitutes a convention of a particular genre.

**couplet:** a **verse form**. In English verse two consecutive, rhyming lines usually containing the same number of stresses. Chaucer first introduced the **iambic pentameter** couplet into English (*Canterbury Tales*); the form was later used in many types of writing, including drama; imitations and translations of **classical epic** (thus *heroic couplet*); essays; and **satire** (see Dryden and Pope). The *distich* (Greek “two lines”) is a couplet usually making complete sense; Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, lines 5–6: “Read it fair queen, though it defective be, / Your excellence can grace both it and me” (see vol. B, [p. 925](#)).

**dactyl** (Greek “finger,” because of the finger’s three joints): a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of one stressed followed by two unstressed syllables. Thus, for example, “Oregon.”

**decorum** (Latin “that which is fitting”): a rhetorical principle whereby each formal aspect of a work should be in keeping with its subject matter and/or audience.

**deixis** (Greek “pointing”): relevant to **point of view**. Every work has, implicitly or explicitly, a “here” and a “now” from which it is narrated. Words that refer to or imply this point from which the voice of the work is projected (such as “here,” “there,” “this,” “that,” “now,” “then”) are examples of deixis, or “deictics.” This technique is especially important in drama, where it is used to create a sense of the events happening as the spectator witnesses them.

**denotation**: A word has a basic, “prosaic” (factual) meaning prior to the associations it connotes (see **connotation**). The word “steed,” for example, might call to mind a horse fitted with battle gear, to be ridden by a warrior, but its denotation is simply “horse.”

**d enouement** (French “unknotting”): the point at which a narrative can be resolved and so ended.

**dialogue** (Greek “conversation”): a **genre**. Dialogue is a feature of many genres, especially in both the **novel** and drama. As a genre itself, dialogue is used in philosophical traditions especially (most famously in Plato’s *Dialogues*), as the representation of a conversation in which a philosophical question is pursued among various speakers.

**d iction**, or “**lexis**” (from, respectively, Latin *dictio* and Greek *lexis*, each meaning “word”): the actual words used in any utterance—speech, writing, and, for our purposes here, literary works. The choice of words contributes significantly to the style of a given work.

**d idactic mode** (Greek “teaching mode”): **Genres** in a didactic mode are designed to instruct or teach, sometimes explicitly (for example, sermons, philosophical **discourses**, **georgic**), and sometimes through the medium of fiction (for example, **animal fable**, **parable**).



**diegesis** (Greek for "narration"): a term that simply means "narration," but is used in literary criticism to distinguish one kind of story from another. In a *mimetic* story, the events are played out before us (see **mimesis**), whereas in diegesis someone recounts the story to us. Drama is for the most part *mimetic*, whereas the novel is for the most part diegetic. In novels the narrator is not, usually, part of the action of the narrative; s/he is therefore extradiegetic.

**dimeter** (Greek "two measure"): a term of **meter**. A two-stress line, rarely used as the meter of whole poems, though used with great frequency in single poems by Skelton, for example, "The Tunning of Elinour Rummung" (see vol. B, [p. 41](#)). Otherwise used for single lines, as in Herbert, "Discipline," line 3: "O my God" (see vol. B, p. 1197).

**discourse** (Latin "running to and fro"): broadly, any nonfictional speech or writing; as a more specific genre, a philosophical meditation on a set theme.

**dramatic irony**: a feature of narrative and drama, whereby the audience knows that the outcome of an action will be the opposite of that intended by a **character**.

**dramatic monologue** (Greek "single speaking"): a **genre**. A poem in which the voice of a historical or fictional **character** speaks, unmediated by any narrator, to an implied though silent audience. See Tennyson, "Ulysses" (vol. E, p. 217 ); Browning, "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" (vol. E, p. 416 ); Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (vol. F, p. 498 ); Carol Ann Duffy, "Medusa" and "Mrs Lazarus" (vol. F).

**ecphrasis** (Greek "speaking out"): a **topos** whereby a work of visual art is represented in a literary work. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts" (see vol. F, p. 677).

**elegy**: a **genre**. In **classical** literature elegy was a form written in elegiac **couplets** (a **hexameter** followed by a **pentameter**)



devoted to many possible topics. In Ovidian elegy a lover meditates on the trials of erotic desire (for example, Ovid's *Amores*). The **sonnet** sequences of both Sidney and Shakespeare exploit this genre, and, while it was still practiced in classical tradition by Donne ("On His Mistress" [see vol. B, [p. 903](#)]), by the later seventeenth century the term came to denote the poetry of loss, especially through the death of a loved person. See Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (vol. E, p. 231); Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (see vol. F, p. 677); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F).

**emblem** (Greek "an insertion"): a **figure of thought**. A picture allegorically expressing a moral, or a verbal picture open to such interpretation.

**end-stopping**: the placement of a complete syntactic unit within a complete poetic line, fulfilling the metrical pattern; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," line 42: "Earth, receive an honoured guest" (see vol. F, p. 679). Compare **enjambment**.

**enjambment** (French "striding," encroaching): The opposite of **end-stopping**, enjambment occurs when the syntactic unit does not end with the end of the poetic line and the fulfillment of the metrical pattern. When the sense of the line overflows its meter and, therefore, the line break, we have enjambment; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," lines 44–45: "Let the Irish vessel lie / Emptied of its poetry" (see vol. F, p. 679).

**epic** (synonym, *heroic poetry*): a **genre**. An extended narrative poem celebrating martial heroes, invoking divine inspiration, beginning in medias res (see **order**), written in a high style (including the deployment of **epic similes**; on high style, see **register**), and divided into long narrative sequences. Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* were the prime models for English writers of epic verse. Thus Milton, *Paradise Lost* (see vol. B, p. 1429); Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, p. 391); and Walcott, *Omeros* (see vol. F, p. 808). With its precise repertoire of stylistic resources, epic lent itself

easily to **parodic** and **burlesque** forms, known as **mock epic**; thus Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)).

**epigram**: a **genre**. A short, pithy poem wittily expressed, often with wounding intent. See Jonson, *Epigrams* (see vol. B, p. 1049).

**epigraph** (Greek “inscription”): a **genre**. Any formal statement inscribed on stone; also the brief formulation on a book’s title page, or a quotation at the beginning of a poem, introducing the work’s themes in the most compressed form possible.

**epistle** (Latin “letter”): a **genre**. The letter can be shaped as a literary form, involving an intimate address often between equals. The *Epistles* of Horace provided a model for English writers from the sixteenth century. Thus Wyatt, “Mine Own John Pains” (see vol. B, p. 131), or Leapor, “An Epistle to a Lady” (vol. C, [p. 771](#)). Letters can be shaped to form the matter of an extended fiction, as the eighteenth-century epistolary **novel** (for example, Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*).

**epitaph**: a **genre**. A pithy formulation to be inscribed on a funeral monument. Thus Raleigh, “The Author’s Epitaph, Made by Himself” (see vol. B, [p. 479](#)).

**epithalamion** (Greek “concerning the bridal chamber”): a **genre**. A wedding poem, celebrating the marriage and wishing the couple good fortune. Thus Spenser, *Epithalamion* (see vol. B, [p. 455](#)).

**epyllion** (plural “epyllia”) (Greek: “little epic”): a **genre**. A relatively short poem in the meter of epic poetry. See, for example, Marlowe, *Hero and Leander* (vol. B, [p. 562](#)).

**essay** (French “trial, attempt”): a **genre**. An informal philosophical meditation, usually in prose and sometimes in verse. The journalistic periodical essay was developed in the early eighteenth century. Thus Addison and Steele, periodical essays (see vol. C, [p. 281](#)); Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (see vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

**euphemism** (Greek “sweet saying”): a **figure of thought**. The figure by which something distasteful is described in alternative, less repugnant terms (for example, “he passed away”).

**exegesis** (Greek “leading out”): interpretation, traditionally of the biblical text, but, by transference, of any text.

**exemplum** (Latin “example”): an example inserted into a usually nonfictional writing (for example, sermon or **essay**) to give extra force to an abstract thesis.

**fabliau** (French “little story,” plural *fabliaux*): a **genre**. A short, funny, often bawdy narrative in low style (see **register**) imitated and developed from French models, most subtly by Chaucer; see *The Miller’s Prologue and Tale* (vol. A, [p. 494](#)).

**farce** (French “stuffing”): a **genre**. A play designed to provoke laughter through the often humiliating antics of stock **characters**. Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (see vol. C, [p. 221](#)) draws on this tradition.

**figures of speech**: Literary language often employs patterns perceptible to the eye and/or to the ear. Such patterns are called “figures of speech”; in classical rhetoric they were called “schemes” (from Greek *schema*, meaning “form, figure”).

**figures of thought**: Language can also be patterned conceptually, even outside the rules that normally govern it. Literary language in particular exploits this licensed linguistic irregularity. Synonyms for figures of thought are “trope” (Greek “twisting,” referring to the irregularity of use) and “conceit” (Latin “concept,” referring to the fact that these figures are perceptible only to the mind). Be careful not to confuse **trope** with **topos** (a common error).

**first-person narration**: relevant to **point of view**, a narrative in which the voice narrating refers to itself with forms of the first-person pronoun (“I,” “me,” “my,” etc., or possibly “we,” “us,” “our”),

and in which the narrative is determined by the limitations of that voice. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*.

**frame narrative:** Some narratives, particularly collections of narratives, involve a frame narrative that explains the genesis of, and/or gives a perspective on, the main narrative or narratives to follow. Thus Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*; or Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

**free indirect style:** relevant to **point of view**, a narratorial voice that manages, without explicit reference, to imply, and often implicitly to comment on, the voice of a **character** in the narrative itself. Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," where the voice, although strictly that of the adult narrator, manages to convey the child's manner of perception: "—I begin: the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black background—my mother's dress."

**genre and mode:** The **style**, structure, and, often, length of a work, when coupled with a certain subject matter, raise expectations that a literary work conforms to a certain **genre** (French "kind"). Good writers might upset these expectations, but they remain aware of the expectations and thwart them purposefully. Works in different genres may nevertheless participate in the same **mode**, a broader category designating the fundamental perspectives governing various genres of writing. For mode, see **tragic, comic, satiric, and didactic modes**. Genres are fluid, sometimes very fluid (for example, the **novel**); the word "usually" should be added to almost every account of the characteristics of a given genre!

**georgic** (Greek "farming"): a **genre**. Virgil's *Georgics* treat agricultural and occasionally scientific subjects, giving instructions on the proper management of farms. Unlike **pastoral**, which treats the countryside as a place of recreational idleness among shepherds, the georgic treats it as a place of productive labor.

**hermeneutics** (from the Greek god Hermes, messenger between the gods and humankind): the science of interpretation, first formulated as such by the German philosophical theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century.

**heroic poetry:** see **epic**.

**hexameter** (Greek "six measure"): a term of **meter**. The hexameter line (a six-stress line) is the meter of **classical Latin epic**; while not imitated in that form for epic verse in English, some instances of the hexameter exist. See, for example, the last line of a Spenserian stanza, *Faerie Queene* 1.1.2: "O help thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong" (vol. B, [p. 269](#)), or Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," line 1: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree" (vol. F, p. 221 ).

**homily** (Greek "discourse"): a **genre**. A sermon, to be preached in church; *Book of Homilies* (see vol. B, [p. 164](#)). Writers of literary fiction sometimes exploit the homily, or sermon, as in Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 540](#)).

**homophone** (Greek "same sound"): a **figure of speech**. A word that sounds identical to another word but has a different meaning ("bear" / "bare").

**hyperbaton** (Greek "overstepping"): a term of **syntax**. The rearrangement, or inversion, of the expected word order in a sentence or clause. Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," line 38: "If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise" (vol. C, [p. 899](#)). Poets can suspend the expected syntax over many lines, as in the first sentences of the *Canterbury Tales* (vol. A, [p. 474](#)) and of *Paradise Lost* (vol. B, p. 1430).

**hyperbole** (Greek "throwing over"): a **figure of thought**. Overstatement, exaggeration; Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," lines 11–12: "My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires, and more slow" (see vol. B, p. 1273); Auden, "As I Walked Out One

Evening," lines 9–12: " 'I'll love you, dear, I'll love you / Till China and Africa meet / And the river jumps over the mountain / And the salmon sing in the street" (see vol. F, [p. 675](#)).

**hypermetrical** (adj.; Greek "over measured"): a term of **meter**; the word describes a breaking of the expected metrical pattern by at least one extra syllable.

**hypotaxis**, or **subordination** (respectively Greek and Latin "ordering under"): a term of **syntax**. The subordination, by the use of subordinate clauses, of different elements of a sentence to a single main verb. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9.513–15: "As when a ship by skillful steersman wrought / Nigh river's mouth or foreland, where the wind / Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail; So varied he" (vol. B, p. 1588). The contrary principle to **parataxis**.

**iamb**: a term of **rhythm**. The basic foot of English verse; two syllables following the rhythmic pattern of unstressed followed by stressed and producing a rising effect. Thus, for example, "Vermont."

**imitation**: the practice whereby writers strive ideally to reproduce and yet renew the **conventions** of an older form, often derived from **classical** civilization. Such a practice will be praised in periods of classicism (for example, the eighteenth century) and repudiated in periods dominated by a model of inspiration (for example, Romanticism).

**irony** (Greek "dissimulation"): a **figure of thought**. In broad usage, irony designates the result of inconsistency between a statement and a context that undermines the statement. "It's a beautiful day" is unironic if it's a beautiful day; if, however, the weather is terrible, then the inconsistency between statement and context is ironic. The effect is often amusing; the need to be ironic is sometimes produced by censorship of one kind or another. Strictly, irony is a subset of allegory: whereas allegory says one thing and means another, irony says one thing and means its opposite. For an

extended example of irony, see Swift's "Modest Proposal" (vol. C, [p. 511](#)). See also **dramatic irony**.

**journal** (French "daily"): a **genre**. A diary, or daily record of ephemeral experience, whose perspectives are concentrated on, and limited by, the experiences of single days. Thus Pepys, *Diary* (see vol. C, [p. 74](#)).

**lai**: a **genre**. A short narrative, often characterized by images of great intensity; a French term, and a form practiced by Marie de France (see vol. A, [p. 159](#)).

**legend** (Latin "requiring to be read"): a **genre**. A narrative of a celebrated, possibly historical, but mortal **protagonist**. To be distinguished from **myth**. Thus the "Arthurian legend" but the "myth of Proserpine."

**lexical set**: Words that habitually recur together (for example, January, February, March, etc.; or red, white, and blue) form a lexical set.

**litotes** (from Greek "smooth"): a **figure of thought**. Strictly, understatement by denying the contrary; More, *Utopia*: "differences of no slight import" (see vol. B, [p. 49](#)). More loosely, understatement; Stevie Smith, "Sunt Leones," lines 11–12: "And if the Christians felt a little blue— / Well people being eaten often do" (see vol. F, [p. 585](#)).

**lullaby**: a **genre**. A bedtime, sleep-inducing song for children, in simple and regular meter. Adapted by Auden, "Lullaby" (see vol. F, [p. 671](#)).

**lyric** (from Greek "lyre"): Initially meaning a song, "lyric" refers to a short poetic form, without restriction of meter, in which the expression of personal emotion, often by a voice in the first person, is given primacy over narrative sequence. Thus "The Wife's Lament"



(see vol. A, [p. 126](#)); Yeats, "The Wild Swans at Coole" (see vol. F, [p. 229](#)).

**masque:** a **genre**. Costly entertainments of the Stuart court, involving dance, song, speech, and elaborate stage effects, in which courtiers themselves participated.

**metaphor** (Greek "carrying across," etymologically parallel to Latin "translation"): One of the most significant **figures of thought**, metaphor designates identification or implicit identification of one thing with another with which it is not literally identifiable. Blake, "London," lines 11–12: "And the hapless Soldier's sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls" (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)).

**meter:** Verse (from Latin *versus*, turned) is distinguished from prose (from Latin *prorsus*, "straightforward") as a more compressed form of expression, shaped by metrical norms. **Meter** (Greek "measure") refers to the regularly recurring sound pattern of verse lines. The means of producing sound patterns across lines differ in different poetic traditions. Verse may be **quantitative**, or determined by the quantities of syllables (set patterns of long and short syllables), as in Latin and Greek poetry. It may be **syllabic**, determined by fixed numbers of syllables in the line, as in the verse of Romance languages (for example, French and Italian). It may be **accentual**, determined by the number of accents, or stresses in the line, with variable numbers of syllables, as in Old English and some varieties of Middle English alliterative verse. Or it may be **accentual-syllabic**, determined by the numbers of accents, but possessing a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, so as to produce regular numbers of syllables per line. Since Chaucer, English verse has worked primarily within the many possibilities of accentual-syllabic meter. The unit of meter is the **foot**. In English verse the number of feet per line corresponds to the number of accents in a line. For the types and examples of different meters, see **monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter**, and



**hexameter.** In the definitions below, “u” designates one unstressed syllable, and “/” one stressed syllable.

**metonymy** (Greek “change of name”): one of the most significant **figures of thought**. Using a word to **denote** another concept or other concepts, by virtue of habitual association. Thus “The Press,” designating printed news media. Fictional names often work by associations of this kind. Closely related to **synecdoche**.

**mimesis** (Greek for “imitation”): A central function of literature and drama has been to provide a plausible imitation of the reality of the world beyond the literary work; mimesis is the representation and imitation of what is taken to be reality.

***mise-en-abyme*** (French for “cast into the abyss”): Some works of art represent themselves in themselves; if they do so effectively, the represented artifact also represents itself, and so ad infinitum. The effect achieved is called “*mise-en-abyme*.” Hoccleve’s *Complaint*, for example, represents a depressed man reading about a depressed man. This sequence threatens to become a *mise-en-abyme*.

**monometer** (Greek “one measure”): a term of **meter**. An entire line with just one stress; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 15, “most (u) grand (/)” (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)).

**myth: a genre.** The narrative of **protagonists** with, or subject to, superhuman powers. A myth expresses some profound foundational truth, often by accounting for the origin of natural phenomena. To be distinguished from **legend**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

**novel:** an extremely flexible **genre** in both form and subject matter. Usually in prose, giving high priority to narration of events, with a certain expectation of length, novels are preponderantly rooted in a specific, and often complex, social world; sensitive to the realities of material life; and often focused on one **character** or a small circle of central characters. By contrast with chivalric **romance** (the main

European narrative genre prior to the novel), novels tend to eschew the marvelous in favor of a recognizable social world and credible action. The novel's openness allows it to participate in all modes, and to be co-opted for a huge variety of subgenres. In English literature the novel dates from the late seventeenth century and has been astonishingly successful in appealing to a huge readership, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The English and Irish tradition of the novel includes, for example, Fielding, Austen, the Brontë sisters, Dickens, George Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, Lawrence, and Joyce, to name but a few very great exponents of the genre.

**novella:** a **genre**. A short **novel**, often characterized by imagistic intensity. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (see vol. F, [p. 70](#)).

**occupatio** (Latin "taking possession"): a **figure of thought**. Denying that one will discuss a subject while actually discussing it; also known as "praeteritio" (Latin "passing by"). See Chaucer, *Nun's Priest's Tale*, lines 414–31 (see vol. A, [p. 565](#)).

**ode** (Greek "song"): a **genre**. A **lyric** poem in elevated, or high style (see **register**), often addressed to a natural force, a person, or an abstract quality. The Pindaric ode in English is made up of **stanzas** of unequal length, while the Horatian ode has stanzas of equal length. For examples of both types, see, respectively, Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (vol. D, p. 381 ); and Marvell, "An Horatian Ode" (vol. B, p. 1282), or Keats, "Ode on Melancholy" (vol. D, p. 973 ). For a fuller discussion, see the headnote to Jonson's "Ode on Cary and Morison" (vol. B, [p. 1058–59](#)).

**omniscient narrator** (Latin "all-knowing narrator"): relevant to **point of view**. A narrator who, in the fiction of the narrative, has complete access to both the deeds and the thoughts of all **characters** in the narrative. Thus Thomas Hardy, "On the Western Circuit" (see vol. F, [p. 36](#)).

**onomatopoeia** (Greek “name making”): a **figure of speech**.

Verbal sounds that imitate and evoke the sounds they denote.

Hopkins, “Binsey Poplars,” lines 10–12 (about some felled trees): “O if we but knew what we do / When we delve [dig] or hew— / Hack and rack the growing green!” (see vol. E, [p. 726](#)).

**order:** A story may be told in different narrative orders. A narrator might use the sequence of events as they happened, and thereby follow what **classical** rhetoricians called the *natural order*; alternatively, the narrator might reorder the sequence of events, beginning the narration either in the middle or at the end of the sequence of events, thereby following an *artificial order*. If a narrator begins in the middle of events, he or she is said to begin *in medias res* (Latin “in the middle of the matter”). For a brief discussion of these concepts, see Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, “A Letter of the Authors” (vol. B, [p. 265](#)). Modern narratology makes a related distinction, between *histoire* (French “story”) for the natural order that readers mentally reconstruct, and *discours* (French, here “narration”) for the narrative as presented. See also **plot** and **story**.

**ottava rima:** a **verse form**. An eight-line stanza form, rhyming abababcc, using **iambic pentameter**; Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium” (see vol. F, [p. 234](#)). Derived from the Italian poet Boccaccio, an eight-line stanza was used by fifteenth-century English poets for inset passages (for example, Christ’s speech from the Cross in Lydgate’s *Testament*, lines 754–897). The form in this rhyme scheme was used in English poetry for long narrative by, for example, Byron (*Don Juan*; see vol. D, [p. 690](#)).

**oxymoron** (Greek “sharp blunt”): a **figure of thought**. The conjunction of normally incompatible terms; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.63: “darkness visible” (see vol. B, [p. 1431](#)).

**panegyric:** a **genre**. Demonstrative, or epideictic (Greek “showing”), rhetoric was a branch of **classical** rhetoric. Its own two main branches were the rhetoric of praise on the one hand and of

vituperation on the other. Panegyric, or eulogy (Greek “sweet speaking”), or encomium (plural *encomia*), is the term used to describe the speeches or writings of praise.

**parable:** a **genre**. A simple story designed to provoke, and often accompanied by, **allegorical** interpretation, most famously by Christ as reported in the Gospels.

**paradox** (Greek “contrary to received opinion”): a **figure of thought**. An apparent contradiction that requires thought to reveal an inner consistency. Chaucer, “Troilus’s Song,” line 12: “O sweete harm so quainte” (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

**parataxis**, or **coordination** (respectively Greek and Latin “ordering beside”): a term of **syntax**. The coordination, by the use of coordinating conjunctions, of different main clauses in a single sentence. Malory, *Morte Darthur*: “So Sir Lancelot departed and took his sword under his arm, and so he walked in his mantel, that noble knight, and put himself in great jeopardy” (see vol. A, [p. 607](#)). The opposite principle to **hypotaxis**.

**parody:** a work that uses the **conventions** of a particular genre with the aim of comically mocking a **topos**, a genre, or a particular exponent of a genre. Shakespeare parodies the topos of **blazon** in Sonnet 130 (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**pastoral** (from Latin *pastor*, “shepherd”): a **genre**. Pastoral is set among shepherds, making often refined **allusion** to other apparently unconnected subjects (sometimes politics) from the potentially idyllic world of highly literary if illiterate shepherds. Pastoral is distinguished from **georgic** by representing recreational rural idleness, whereas the georgic offers instruction on how to manage rural labor. English writers had classical models in the *Idylls* of Theocritus in Greek and Virgil’s *Eclogues* in Latin. Pastoral is also called bucolic (from the Greek word for “herdsman”). Thus Spenser, *Shepherd’s Calendar* (see vol. B, [p. 257](#)).

**pathetic fallacy:** the attribution of sentiment to natural phenomena, as if they were in sympathy with human feelings. Thus Milton, *Lycidas*, lines 146–47: “With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head, / And every flower that sad embroidery wears” (see vol. B, p. 1406). For critique of the practice, see Ruskin (who coined the term), “Of the Pathetic Fallacy” (vol. E, p. 467 ).

**pentameter** (Greek “five measure”): a term of **meter**. In English verse, a five-stress line. Between the late fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, this meter, frequently employing an iambic rhythm, was the basic line of English verse. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth each, for example, deployed this very flexible line as their primary resource; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.128: “O Prince, O Chief of many thronèd Powers” (see vol. B, p. 1433).

**performative:** Verbal expressions have many different functions. They can, for example, be descriptive, or constative (if they make an argument), or performative, for example. A performative utterance is one that makes something happen in the world by virtue of its utterance. “I hereby sentence you to ten years in prison,” if uttered in the appropriate circumstances, itself performs an action; it makes something happen in the world. By virtue of its performing an action, it is called a “performative.” See also **speech act**.

**peripeteia** (Greek “turning about”): the sudden reversal of fortune (in both directions) in a dramatic work.

**periphrasis** (Greek “declaring around”): a **figure of thought**. Circumlocution; the use of many words to express what could be expressed in few or one; Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 39.1–4.

**persona** (Latin “sound through”): originally the mask worn in the Roman theater to magnify an actor’s voice; in literary discourse persona (plural *personae*) refers to the narrator or speaker of a text, whose voice is coherent and whose person need have no relation to

the person of the actual author of a text. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (see vol. F, [p. 498](#)).

**personification**, or **prosopopoeia** (Greek "person making"): a **figure of thought**. The attribution of human qualities to nonhuman forces or objects; Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," lines 1–2: "Thou still unvanish'd bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time" (see vol. D, [p. 971](#)).

**plot**: the sequence of events in a story as narrated, as distinct from **story**, which refers to the sequence of events as we reconstruct them from the plot. See also **order**.

**point of view**: All of the many kinds of writing involve a point of view from which a text is, or seems to be, generated. The presence of such a point of view may be powerful and explicit, as in many novels, or deliberately invisible, as in much drama. In some genres, such as the **novel**, the narrator does not necessarily tell the story from a position we can predict; that is, the needs of a particular story, not the **conventions** of the genre, determine the narrator's position. In other genres, the narrator's position is fixed by convention; in certain kinds of love poetry, for example, the narrating voice is always that of a suffering lover. Not only does the point of view significantly inform the style of a work, but it also informs the structure of that work.

**protagonist** (Greek "first actor"): the hero or heroine of a drama or narrative.

**pun**: a **figure of thought**. A sometimes irresolvable doubleness of meaning in a single word or expression; Shakespeare, Sonnet 135, line 1: "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*" (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

**quatrain**: a **verse form**. A stanza of four lines, usually rhyming abcb, abab, or abba. Of many possible examples, see Crashaw, "On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord" (see vol. B, p. 1214).

**refrain:** usually a single line repeated as the last line of consecutive stanzas, sometimes with subtly different wording and ideally with subtly different meaning as the poem progresses.

**register:** The register of a word is its stylistic level, which can be distinguished by degree of technicality but also by degree of formality. We choose our words from different registers according to context, that is, audience and/or environment. Thus a chemist in a laboratory will say "sodium chloride," a cook in a kitchen "salt." A formal register designates the kind of language used in polite society (for example, "Mr. President"), while an informal or colloquial register is used in less formal or more relaxed social situations (for example, "the boss"). In **classical** and medieval rhetoric, these registers of formality were called *high style* and *low style*. A *middle style* was defined as the style fit for narrative, not drawing attention to itself.

**rhetoric:** the art of verbal persuasion. **Classical** rhetoricians distinguished three areas of rhetoric: the forensic, to be used in law courts; the deliberative, to be used in political or philosophical deliberations; and the demonstrative, or epideictic, to be used for the purposes of public praise or blame. Rhetorical manuals covered all the skills required of a speaker, from the management of style and structure to delivery. These manuals powerfully influenced the theory of poetics as a separate branch of verbal practice, particularly in the matter of style.

**rhyme:** a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical vowel sounds in stressed syllables whose initial consonants differ ("dead" / "head"). In poetry, rhyme often links the end of one line with another. *Masculine rhyme*: full rhyme on the final syllable of the line ("decays" / "days"). *Feminine rhyme*: full rhyme on syllables that are followed by unaccented syllables ("fountains" / "mountains"). *Internal rhyme*: full rhyme within a single line; Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, line 7: "The guests are met, the feast is set" (see vol. D, [p. 475](#)). *Rhyme riche*: rhyming on **homophones**;



Chaucer, *General Prologue*, lines 17–18: “seeke” / “seke.” *Off rhyme* (also known as *half rhyme*, *near rhyme*, or *slant rhyme*): differs from perfect rhyme in changing the vowel sound and/or the concluding consonants expected of perfect rhyme; Byron, “They say that Hope is Happiness,” lines 5–7: “most” / “lost.” *Pararhyme*: stressed vowel sounds differ but are flanked by identical or similar consonants; Owen, “Miners,” lines 9–11: “simmer” / “summer” (see vol. F, [p. 169](#)).

**rhyme royal**: a **verse form**. A **stanza** of seven **iambic pentameter** lines, rhyming ababbcc; first introduced by Chaucer and called “royal” because the form was used by James I of Scotland for his *Kingis Quair* in the early fifteenth century. Chaucer, “Troilus’s Song” (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

**rhythm**: Rhythm is not absolutely distinguishable from **meter**. One way of making a clear distinction between these terms is to say that rhythm (from the Greek “to flow”) denotes the patterns of sound within the feet of verse lines and the combination of those feet. Very often a particular meter will raise expectations that a given rhythm will be used regularly through a whole line or a whole poem. Thus in English verse the pentameter regularly uses an iambic rhythm. Rhythm, however, is much more fluid than meter, and many lines within the same poem using a single meter will frequently exploit different rhythmic possibilities. For examples of different rhythms, see **iamb**, **trochee**, **anapest**, **spondee**, and **dactyl**.

**romance**: a **genre**. From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the main form of European narrative, in either verse or prose, was that of chivalric romance. Romance, like the later **novel**, is a very fluid genre, but romances are often characterized by (i) a tripartite structure of social integration, followed by disintegration, involving moral tests and often marvelous events, itself the prelude to reintegration in a happy ending, frequently of marriage; and (ii) aristocratic social milieux. Thus *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)); Spenser’s (unfinished) *Faerie Queene* (vol. B, [p.](#)



[263](#)). The immensely popular, fertile genre was absorbed, in both domesticated and undomesticated form, by the novel. For an adaptation of romance, see Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Tale* (vol. A, [p. 512](#)).

**sarcasm** (Greek "flesh tearing"): a **figure of thought**. A wounding expression, often expressed ironically; Boswell, *Life of Johnson*: Johnson [asked if any man of the modern age could have written the **epic** poem *Fingal*] replied, "Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children" (see vol. C, [p. 891](#)).

**satire** (Latin for "a bowl of mixed fruits"): a **genre**. In Roman literature (for example, Juvenal), the communication, in the form of a letter between equals, complaining of the ills of contemporary society. The genre in this form is characterized by a first-person narrator exasperated by social ills; the letter form; a high frequency of contemporary reference; and the use of invective in **low-style** language. Pope practices the genre thus in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (see vol. C, [p. 573](#)). Wyatt's "Mine Own John Poins" (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)) draws ultimately on a gentler, Horatian model of the genre.

**satiric mode**: Works in a very large variety of genres are devoted to the more or less savage attack on social ills. Thus Swift's travel narrative *Gulliver's Travels* (see vol. C, [p. 377](#)), his **essay** "A Modest Proposal" (vol. C, [p. 511](#)), and Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (vol. C, [p. 587](#)), to look no further than the eighteenth century, are all within a satiric mode.

**scene**: a subdivision of an **act**, itself a subdivision of a dramatic performance and/or text. The action of a scene usually occurs in one place.

**sensibility** (from Latin, "capable of being perceived by the senses"): as a literary term, an eighteenth-century concept derived from moral philosophy that stressed the social importance of fellow

feeling and particularly of sympathy in social relations. The concept generated a literature of "sensibility," such as the sentimental **novel** (the most famous of which was Goethe's *Sorrows of the Young Werther* [1774]), or sentimental poetry, such as Cowper's passage on the stricken deer in *The Task* (see vol. C, [p. 1076](#)).

**short story:** a **genre**. Generically similar to, though shorter and more concentrated than, the **novel**; often published as part of a collection. Thus Mansfield, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" (see vol. F, [p. 542](#)).

**simile** (Latin "like"): a **figure of thought**. Comparison, usually using the word "like" or "as," of one thing with another so as to produce sometimes surprising analogies. Donne, "The Storm," lines 29–30: "Sooner than you read this line did the gale, / Like shot, not feared till felt, our sails assail." Frequently used, in extended form, in **epic** poetry; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.338–46 (see vol. B, p. 1438).

**soliloquy** (Latin "single speaking"): a **topos** of drama, in which a **character**, alone or thinking to be alone on stage, speaks so as to give the audience access to his or her private thoughts.

**sonnet:** a **verse form**. A form combining a variable number of units of rhymed lines to produce a fourteen-line poem, usually in rhyming **iambic pentameter** lines. In English there are two principal varieties: the Petrarchan sonnet, formed by an octave (an eight-line stanza, often broken into two **quatrains** having the same rhyme scheme, typically abba abba) and a sestet (a six-line stanza, typically cdecde or cdcdcd); and the Shakespearean sonnet, formed by three quatrains (abab cdcd efef) and a **couplet** (gg). The declaration of a sonnet can take a sharp turn, or "volta," often at the decisive formal shift from octave to sestet in the Petrarchan sonnet, or in the final couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet, introducing a trenchant counterstatement. Derived from Italian poetry, and especially from the poetry of Petrarch, the sonnet was first introduced to English poetry by Wyatt, and initially used principally

for the expression of unrequited erotic love, though later poets used the form for many other purposes. See Wyatt, "Whoso List to Hunt" (vol. B, [p. 123](#)); Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (vol. B, [p. 541](#)); Shakespeare, Sonnets (vol. B, [p. 624](#)); Wordsworth, "London, 1802" (vol. D, p. 390 ); McKay, "If We Must Die" (vol. F, p. 576 ); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F).

**speech act:** Words and deeds are often distinguished, but words are often (perhaps always) themselves deeds. Utterances can perform different speech acts, such as promising, declaring, casting a spell, encouraging, persuading, denying, lying, and so on. See also **performative**.

**Spenserian stanza:** a **verse form**. The stanza developed by Spenser for *The Faerie Queene*; nine **iambic** lines, the first eight of which are **pentameters**, followed by one **hexameter**, rhyming ababbcbcc. See also, for example, Shelley, *Adonais* (vol. D, p. 851 ), and Keats, *The Eve of St. Agnes* (vol. D, p. 953 ).

**spondee:** a term of **meter**. A two-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two stressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Utah."

**stanza** (Italian "room"): groupings of two or more lines, though "stanza" is usually reserved for groupings of at least four lines. Stanzas are often joined by rhyme, often in sequence, where each group shares the same metrical pattern and, when rhymed, rhyme scheme. Stanzas can themselves be arranged into larger groupings. Poets often invent new **verse forms**, or they may work within established forms.

**story:** a narrative's sequence of events, which we reconstruct from those events as they have been recounted by the narrator (i.e., the **plot**). See also **order**.

**stream of consciousness:** usually a **first-person** narrative that seems to give the reader access to the narrator's mind as it

perceives or reflects on events, prior to organizing those perceptions into a coherent narrative. Thus (though generated from a **third-person** narrative) Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Penelope" (see vol. F, [p. 452](#)).

**style** (from Latin for "writing instrument"): In literary works the manner in which something is expressed contributes substantially to its meaning. The expressions "sun," "mass of helium at the center of the solar system," "heaven's golden orb" all designate "sun," but do so in different manners, or styles, which produce different meanings. The manner of a literary work is its "style," the effect of which is its "tone." We often can intuit the tone of a text; from that intuition of tone we can analyze the stylistic resources by which it was produced. We can analyze the style of literary works through consideration of different elements of style; for example, **diction, figures of thought, figures of speech, meter and rhythm, verse form, syntax, point of view.**

**sublime:** As a concept generating a literary movement, the sublime refers to the realm of experience beyond the measurable, and so beyond the rational, produced especially by the terrors and grandeur of natural phenomena. Derived especially from the first-century Greek treatise *On the Sublime*, sometimes attributed to Longinus, the notion of the sublime was in the later eighteenth century a spur to Romanticism.

**syllable:** the smallest unit of sound in a pronounced word. The syllable that receives the greatest stress is called the *tonic* syllable.

**symbol** (Greek "token"): a **figure of thought**. Something that stands for something else, and yet seems necessarily to evoke that other thing. In Neoplatonic, and therefore Romantic, theory, to be distinguished from **allegory** thus: whereas allegory involves connections between vehicle and tenor agreed by convention or made explicit, the meanings of a symbol are supposedly inherent to it.

**synecdoche** (Greek “to take with something else”): a **figure of thought**. Using a part to express the whole, or vice versa; for example, “all hands on deck.” Closely related to **metonymy**.

**syntax** (Greek “ordering with”): Syntax designates the rules by which sentences are constructed in a given language. Discussion of meter is impossible without some reference to syntax, since the overall effect of a poem is, in part, always the product of a subtle balance of meter and sentence construction. Syntax is also essential to the understanding of prose style, since prose writers, deprived of the full shaping possibilities of meter, rely all the more heavily on syntactic resources. A working command of syntactical practice requires an understanding of the parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, and interjections), since writers exploit syntactic possibilities by using particular combinations and concentrations of the parts of speech.

**taste** (from Italian “touch”): Although medieval monastic traditions used eating and tasting as a metaphor for reading, the concept of taste as a personal ideal to be cultivated by, and applied to, the appreciation and judgment of works of art in general was developed in the eighteenth century.

**tercet:** a **verse form**. A stanza or group of three lines, used in larger forms such as **terza rima**, the **Petrarchan sonnet**, and the **villanelle**.

**terza rima:** a **verse form**. A sequence of rhymed **tercets** linked by rhyme thus: aba bcb cdc, etc. first used extensively by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, the form was adapted in English **iambic pentameters** by Wyatt and revived in the nineteenth century. See Wyatt, “Mine Own John Poins” (vol. B, [p. 131](#)); Shelley, “Ode to the West Wind” (vol. D, p. 802 ); and Morris, “The Defence of Guinevere” (vol. E, p. 657 ). For modern adaptations see Eliot, lines 78–149 (though unrhymed) of “Little Gidding” (vol. F, [pp. 523–25](#)); Heaney, “Station Island” (vol. F); Walcott, *Omeros* (vol. F, p. 808 ).

**tetrameter** (Greek “four measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with four stresses. Coleridge, *Christabel*, line 31: “She stole along, she nothing spoke” (see vol. D, [p. 495](#)).

**theme** (Greek “proposition”): In literary criticism the term designates what the work is about; the theme is the concept that unifies a given work of literature.

**third-person narration**: relevant to **point of view**. A narration in which the narrator recounts a narrative of **characters** referred to explicitly or implicitly by third-person pronouns (“he,” “she,” etc.), without the limitation of a **first-person narration**. Thus Johnson, *The History of Rasselas*.

**topographical poem** (Greek “place writing”): a **genre**. A poem devoted to the meditative description of particular places.

**topos** (Greek “place,” plural *topoi*): a commonplace in the content of a given kind of literature. Originally, in **classical** rhetoric, the *topoi* were tried-and-tested stimuli to literary invention: lists of standard headings under which a subject might be investigated. In medieval narrative poems, for example, it was commonplace to begin with a description of spring. Writers did, of course, render the commonplace uncommon, as in Chaucer’s spring scene at the opening of *The Canterbury Tales* (see vol. A, [p. 474](#)).

**tradition** (from Latin “passing on”): A literary tradition is whatever is passed on or revived from the past in a single literary culture, or drawn from others to enrich a writer’s culture. “Tradition” is fluid in reference, ranging from small to large referents: thus it may refer to a relatively small aspect of texts (for example, the tradition of **iambic pentameter**), or it may, at the other extreme, refer to the body of texts that constitute a **canon**.

**tragedy**: a **genre**. A dramatic representation of the fall of kings or nobles, beginning in happiness and ending in catastrophe. Later

transferred to other social milieux. The opposite of **comedy**; thus Shakespeare, *Othello* (see vol. B, [p. 640](#)).

**tragic mode:** Many genres (**epic** poetry, **legendary** chronicles, **tragedy**, the **novel**) either do or can participate in a tragic mode, by representing the fall of noble **protagonists** and the irreparable ravages of human society and history.

**tragicomedy:** a **genre**. A play in which potentially tragic events turn out to have a happy, or **comic**, ending. Thus Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*.

**translation** (Latin "carrying across"): the rendering of a text written in one language into another.

**trimeter** (Greek "three measure"): a term of **meter**. A line with three stresses. Herbert, "Discipline," line 1: "Throw away thy rod" (see vol. B, p. 1197).

**triplet:** a **verse form**. A **tercet** rhyming on the same sound. Pope inserts triplets among heroic **couplets** to emphasize a particular thought; see *Essay on Criticism*, 315–17 (vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

**trochee:** a term of **rhythm**. A two-syllable foot following the pattern, in English verse, of stressed followed by unstressed syllable, producing a falling effect. Thus, for example, "Texas."

**type** (Greek "impression, figure"): a **figure of thought**. In Christian allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, pre-Christian figures were regarded as "types," or foreshadowings, of Christ or the Christian dispensation. *Typology* has been the source of much visual and literary art in which the parallelisms between old and new are extended to nonbiblical figures; thus the virtuous plowman in *Piers Plowman* becomes a type of Christ.

**unities:** According to a theory supposedly derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*, the events represented in a play should have unity of time,



place, and action: that the play take up no more time than the time of the play, or at most a day; that the space of action should be within a single city; and that there should be no subplot. See Johnson, *The Preface to Shakespeare* (vol. C, [p. 876](#)).

**vernacular** (from Latin *verna*, “servant”): the language of the people, as distinguished from learned and arcane languages. From the later Middle Ages especially, the “vernacular” languages and literatures of Europe distinguished themselves from the learned languages and literatures of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

**verse form:** The terms related to **meter** and **rhythm** describe the shape of individual lines. Lines of verse are combined to produce larger groupings, called verse forms. These larger groupings are in the first instance **stanzas**. The combination of a certain meter and stanza shape constitutes the verse form, of which there are many standard kinds.

**villanelle:** a **verse form**. A fixed form of usually five **tercets** and a **quatrain** employing only two rhyme sounds altogether, rhyming aba for the tercets and abaa for the quatrain, with a complex pattern of two **refrains**. Derived from a French fixed form. Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (see vol. F, [p. 693](#)).

**wit:** Originally a synonym for “reason” in Old and Middle English, “wit” became a literary ideal in the Renaissance as brilliant play of the full range of mental resources. For eighteenth-century writers, the notion necessarily involved pleasing expression, as in Pope’s definition of true wit as “Nature to advantage dressed, / What oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed” (*Essay on Criticism*, lines 297–98; see vol. C, [p. 527](#)). Romantic theory of the imagination deprived wit of its full range of apprehension, whence the word came to be restricted to its modern sense, as the clever play of mind that produces laughter.



**zeugma** (Greek “a yoking”): a **figure of thought**. A figure whereby one word applies to two or more words in a sentence, and in which the applications are surprising, either because one is unusual, or because the applications are made in very different ways; Pope, *Rape of the Lock* 3.7–8, in which the word “take” is used in two senses: “Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, / Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea” (see vol. C, [p. 546](#)).

## B: Publishing History, Censorship

By the time we read texts in published books, they have already been treated—that is, changed by authors, editors, and printers—in many ways. Although there are differences across history, in each period literary works are subject to pressures of many kinds, which apply before, while, and after an author writes. The pressures might be financial, as in the relations of author and patron; commercial, as in the marketing of books; and legal, as in, during some periods, the negotiation through official and unofficial censorship. In addition, texts in all periods undergo technological processes, as they move from the material forms in which an author produced them to the forms in which they are presented to readers. Some of the terms below designate important material forms in which books were produced, disseminated, and surveyed across the historical span of this anthology. Others designate the skills developed to understand these processes. The anthology's introductions to individual periods discuss the particular forms these phenomena took in different eras.

**bookseller:** In England, and particularly in London, commercial bookmaking and -selling enterprises came into being in the early fourteenth century. These were loose organizations of artisans who usually lived in the same neighborhoods (around St. Paul's Cathedral in London). A bookseller or dealer would coordinate the production of hand-copied books for wealthy patrons (see **patronage**), who would order books to be custom-made. After the introduction of **printing** in the late fifteenth century, authors generally sold the rights to their work to booksellers, without any further **royalties**. Booksellers, who often had their own shops, belonged to the **Stationers' Company**. This system lasted into the eighteenth century. In 1710, however, authors were for the first time granted **copyright**, which tipped the commercial balance in their favor, against booksellers.

**censorship:** The term applies to any mechanism for restricting what can be published. Historically, the reasons for imposing censorship are heresy, sedition, blasphemy, libel, or obscenity. External censorship is imposed by institutions having legislative sanctions at their disposal. Thus the pre-Reformation Church imposed the Constitutions of Archbishop Arundel of 1409, aimed at repressing the Lollard “heresy.” After the Reformation, some key events in the history of censorship are as follows: 1547, when anti-Lollard legislation and legislation made by Henry VIII concerning treason by writing (1534) were abolished; the Licensing Order of 1643, which legislated that works be licensed, through the Stationers’ Company, prior to publication; and 1695, when the last such Act stipulating prepublication licensing lapsed. Postpublication censorship continued in different periods for different reasons. Thus, for example, British publication of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) was obstructed (though unsuccessfully) in 1960, under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. Censorship can also be international: although not published in Iran, Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1988) was censored in that country, where the leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, proclaimed a fatwa (religious decree) promising the author’s execution. Very often censorship is not imposed externally, however: authors or publishers can censor work in anticipation of what will incur the wrath of readers or the penalties of the law. Victorian and Edwardian publishers of **novels**, for example, urged authors to remove potentially offensive material, especially for serial publication in popular magazines.

**codex:** the physical format of most modern books and medieval manuscripts, consisting of a series of separate leaves gathered into quires and bound together, often with a cover. In late antiquity, the codex largely replaced the scroll, the standard form of written documents in Roman culture.

**copy text:** the particular text of a work used by a textual editor as the basis of an edition of that work.

**copyright:** the legal protection afforded to authors for control of their work's publication, in an attempt to ensure due financial reward. Some key dates in the history of copyright in the United Kingdom are as follows: 1710, when a statute gave authors the exclusive right to publish their work for fourteen years, and fourteen years more if the author were still alive when the first term had expired; 1842, when the period of authorial control was extended to forty-two years; and 1911, when the term was extended yet further, to fifty years after the author's death. In 1995 the period of protection was harmonized with the laws in other European countries to be the life of the author plus seventy years. In the United States no works first published before 1923 are in copyright. Works published since 1978 are, as in the United Kingdom, protected for the life of the author plus seventy years.

**folio:** the leaf formed by both sides of a single page. Each folio has two sides: a *recto* (the front side of the leaf, on the right side of a double-page spread in an open codex), and a *verso* (the back side of the leaf, on the left side of a double-page spread). Modern book pagination follows the pattern 1, 2, 3, 4, while medieval manuscript pagination follows the pattern 1r, 1v, 2r, 2v. "Folio" can also designate the size of a printed book. Books come in different shapes, depending originally on the number of times a standard sheet of paper is folded. One fold produces a large volume, a *folio* book; two folds produce a *quarto*, four an *octavo*, and six a very small *duodecimo*. Generally speaking, the larger the book, the grander and more expensive. Shakespeare's plays were, for example, first printed in quartos, but were gathered into a folio edition in 1623.

**foul papers:** versions of a work before an author has produced, if she or he has, a final copy (a "fair copy") with all corrections removed.

**incunabulum** (plural "incunabula"): any printed book produced in Europe before 1501. Famous incunabula include the Gutenberg Bible, printed in 1455.

**manuscript** (Latin, “written by hand”): Any text written physically by hand is a manuscript. Before the introduction of **printing** with moveable type in 1476, all texts in England were produced and reproduced by hand, in manuscript. This is an extremely labor-intensive task, using expensive materials (for example, **vellum**, or **parchment**); the cost of books produced thereby was, accordingly, very high. Even after the introduction of printing, many texts continued to be produced in manuscript. This is obviously true of letters, for example, but until the eighteenth century, poetry written within aristocratic circles was often transmitted in manuscript copies.

**paleography** (Greek “ancient writing”): the art of deciphering, describing, and dating forms of handwriting.

**parchment**: animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **vellum**.

**patronage, patron** (Latin “protector”): Many technological, legal, and commercial supports were necessary before professional authorship became possible. Although some playwrights (for example, Shakespeare) made a living by writing for the theater, other authors needed, principally, the large-scale reproductive capacities of **printing** and the security of **copyright** to make a living from writing. Before these conditions obtained, many authors had another main occupation, and most authors had to rely on patronage. In different periods, institutions or individuals offered material support, or patronage, to authors. Thus in Anglo-Saxon England, monasteries afforded the conditions of writing to monastic authors. Between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries, the main source of patronage was the royal court. Authors offered patrons prestige and ideological support in return for financial support. Even as the conditions of professional authorship came into being at the beginning of the eighteenth century, older forms of direct patronage were not altogether displaced until the middle of the century.

**p eriodical:** Whereas journalism, strictly, applies to daily writing (from French *jour*, “day”), periodical writing appears at larger, but still frequent, intervals, characteristically in the form of the **essay**. Periodicals were developed especially in the eighteenth century.

**p rinting:** Printing, or the mechanical reproduction of books using moveable type, was invented in Germany in the mid-fifteenth century by Johannes Gutenberg; it quickly spread throughout Europe. William Caxton brought printing into England from the Low Countries in 1476. Much greater powers of reproduction at much lower prices transformed every aspect of literary culture.

**p ublisher:** the person or company responsible for the commissioning and publicizing of printed matter. In the early period of **printing**, publisher, printer, and bookseller were often the same person. This trend continued in the ascendancy of the **Stationers’ Company**, between the middle of the sixteenth and the end of the seventeenth centuries. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, these three functions began to separate, leading to their modern distinctions.

**quire:** When medieval manuscripts were assembled, a few loose sheets of parchment or paper would first be folded together and sewn along the fold. This formed a quire (also known as a “gathering” or “signature”). Folded in this way, four large sheets of parchment would produce eight smaller manuscript leaves. Multiple quires could then be bound together to form a codex.

**royalties:** an agreed-upon proportion of the price of each copy of a work sold, paid by the publisher to the author, or an agreed-upon fee paid to the playwright for each performance of a play.

**scribe:** In **manuscript** culture, the scribe is the copyist who reproduces a text by hand.

**s criptorium** (plural “scriptoria”): a place for producing written documents and manuscripts.

**serial publication:** generally referring to the practice, especially common in the nineteenth century, of publishing novels a few chapters at a time, in periodicals.

**Stationers' Company:** The Stationers' Company was an English guild incorporating various tradesmen, including printers, publishers, and booksellers, skilled in the production and selling of books. It was formed in 1403, received its royal charter in 1557, and served as a means both of producing and of regulating books. Authors would sell the manuscripts of their books to individual stationers, who incurred the risks and took the profits of producing and selling the books. The stationers entered their rights over given books in the Stationers' Register. They also regulated the book trade and held their monopoly by licensing books and by being empowered to seize unauthorized books and imprison resisters. This system of licensing broke down in the social unrest of the Civil War and Interregnum (1640–60), and it ended in 1695. Even after the end of licensing, the Stationers' Company continued to be an intrinsic part of the **copyright** process, since the 1710 copyright statute directed that copyright had to be registered at Stationers' Hall.

**subscription:** An eighteenth-century system of bookselling somewhere between direct **patronage** and impersonal sales. A subscriber paid half the cost of a book before publication and half on delivery. The author received these payments directly. The subscriber's name appeared in the prefatory pages.

**textual criticism:** Works in all periods often exist in many subtly or not so subtly different forms. This is especially true with regard to manuscript textual reproduction, but it also applies to printed texts. Textual criticism is the art, developed from the fifteenth century in Italy but raised to new levels of sophistication from the eighteenth century, of deciphering different historical states of texts. This art involves the analysis of textual **variants**, often with the aim of distinguishing authorial from scribal forms.

**variants:** differences that appear among different manuscripts or printed editions of the same text.

**vellum:** animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **parchment**.

**watermark:** the trademark of a paper manufacturer, impressed into the paper but largely invisible unless held up to light.



# Geographic Nomenclature

**The British Isles** refers to the prominent group of islands off the northwest coast of Europe, especially to the two largest, **Great Britain** and **Ireland**. At present these comprise two sovereign states: **the Republic of Ireland**, and **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**—known for short as the **United Kingdom** or the **U.K.** Most of the smaller islands are part of the **U.K.** but a few, like the **Isle of Man** and the tiny **Channel Islands**, are largely independent. The **U.K.** is often loosely referred to as “**Britain**” or “**Great Britain**” and is sometimes called simply, if inaccurately, “**England**.” For obvious reasons, the latter usage is rarely heard among the inhabitants of the other countries of the **U.K.—Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland** (sometimes called **Ulster**). England is by far the most populous part of the kingdom, as well as the seat of its capital, London.

From the first to the fifth century C.E. most of what is now **England** and **Wales** was a province of the Roman Empire called **Britain** (in Latin, **Britannia**). After the fall of Rome, much of the island was invaded and settled by peoples from northern Germany and Denmark speaking what we now call Old English. These peoples are known as the Angles and the Saxons (the word **England** is related to **Angles**). By the time of the Norman Conquest (1066) most of the kingdoms founded by the Angles, the Saxons, and the subsequent Viking invaders had coalesced into the kingdom of **England**, which, in the latter Middle Ages, conquered and largely absorbed the neighboring Celtic kingdom of **Wales**. In 1603 James VI of **Scotland** inherited the island’s other throne as James I of **England**, and for the next hundred years—except for the two decades of Puritan rule—**Scotland** (both its English-speaking **Lowlands** and its Gaelic-speaking **Highlands**) and **England** (with **Wales**) were two kingdoms under a single king. In 1707 the Act of Union brought them together as **the United Kingdom of Great**

**Britain. Ireland**, where English rule had begun in the twelfth century and been tightened in the sixteenth, was incorporated by the 1800–1801 Act of Union into **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**. With the division of Ireland and the establishment of **the Irish Free State** after World War I, this name was modified to its present form, and in 1949 **the Irish Free State** became **the Republic of Ireland**, or **Éire**. In 1999 **Scotland** elected a separate parliament it had relinquished in 1707, and **Wales** elected an assembly it lost in 1409; neither Scotland nor Wales ceased to be part of the **United Kingdom**.

The **British Isles** are further divided into counties, which in **Great Britain** are also known as shires. This word, with its vowel shortened in pronunciation, forms the suffix in the names of many counties, such as **Yorkshire, Wiltshire, Somersetshire**.

The Latin names **Britannia (Britain), Caledonia (Scotland),** and **Hibernia (Ireland)** are sometimes used in poetic diction; so too is **Britain's** ancient Celtic name, **Albion**. Because of its accidental resemblance to *albus* (Latin for “white”), **Albion** is especially associated with the chalk cliffs that seem to gird much of the English coast like defensive walls.

**The British Empire** took its name from **the British Isles** because it was created not only by the **English** but also by the **Irish, Scots, and Welsh**, as well as by civilians and servicemen from other constituent countries of the empire. Some of the empire's **overseas colonies**, or **crown colonies**, were populated largely by settlers of European origin and their descendants. These predominantly White **settler colonies**, such as **Canada, Australia, and New Zealand**, were allowed significant self-government in the nineteenth century and recognized as **dominions** in the early twentieth century. The **White dominions** became members of **the Commonwealth of Nations**, also called **the Commonwealth, the British Commonwealth**, and “**the Old Commonwealth**” at different times, an association of sovereign states under the symbolic leadership of the British monarch.

Other **overseas colonies** of the empire had mostly Indigenous populations (or, in the Caribbean, the descendants of enslaved people, indentured servants, and others). These **colonies** were granted political independence after World War II, later than the **dominions**, and have often been referred to since as **postcolonial** nations. In South and Southeast Asia, **India** and **Pakistan** gained independence in 1947, followed by other countries including **Sri Lanka** (formerly **Ceylon**), **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), **Malaya** (now **Malaysia**), and **Singapore**. In West and East Africa, the **Gold Coast** was decolonized as **Ghana** in 1957, **Nigeria** in 1960, **Sierra Leone** in 1961, **Uganda** in 1962, **Kenya** in 1963, and so forth, while in southern Africa, the White minority government of **South Africa** was already independent in 1931, though majority rule did not come until 1994. In the Caribbean, **Jamaica** and **Trinidad and Tobago** became independent in 1962, followed by **Barbados** in 1966, and other islands of the British West Indies in the 1970s and '80s. Other regions from which nations emerged out of British colonial rule included Central America (**British Honduras**, now **Belize**), South America (**British Guiana**, now **Guyana**), the Pacific islands (**Fiji**), and Europe (**Cyprus**, **Malta**). After decolonization, many of these nations chose to remain within a newly conceived **Commonwealth** and are sometimes referred to as "**New Commonwealth**" countries. Some nations, such as **Ireland**, **Pakistan**, and **South Africa**, withdrew from the **Commonwealth**, though **South Africa** and **Paki stan** eventually rejoined, and others, such as **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), gained independence outside the **Commonwealth**. Britain's last major overseas colony, **Hong Kong**, was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, but while Britain retains only a handful of dependent territories, such as **Bermuda** and **Montserrat**, the scope of the **Commonwealth** remains vast, with approximately 30 percent of the world's population.

# British Money

One of the most dramatic changes to the system of British money came in 1971. In the system previously in place, the pound consisted of 20 shillings, each containing 12 pence, making 240 pence to the pound. Since 1971, British money has been calculated on the decimal system, with 100 pence to the pound. Britons' experience of paper money did not change very drastically: as before, 5- and 10-pound notes constitute the majority of bills passing through their hands (in addition, 20- and 50-pound notes have been added). But the shift necessitated a whole new way of thinking about and exchanging coins and marked the demise of the shilling, one of the fundamental units of British monetary history. Many other coins, still frequently encountered in literature, had already passed. These include the groat, worth 4 pence (the word "groat" is often used to signify a trifling sum); the angel (which depicted the archangel Michael triumphing over a dragon), valued at 10 shillings; the mark, worth in its day two-thirds of a pound or 13 shillings 4 pence; and the sovereign, a gold coin initially worth 22 shillings 6 pence, later valued at 1 pound, last circulated in 1932. One prominent older coin, the guinea, was worth a pound and a shilling; though it has not been minted since 1813, a very few quality items or prestige awards (like the purse in a horse race) may still be quoted in guineas. (The table below includes some other obsolete coins.) Colloquially, a pound was (and is) called a quid; a shilling a bob; sixpence, a tanner; a copper could refer to a penny, a half-penny, or a farthing (1/4 penny).

<i>Old Currency</i>	<i>New Currency</i>
1 pound note	1 pound coin (or note in Scotland)
10 shilling (half-pound note)	50 pence
5 shilling (crown)	
21/2 shilling (half crown)	20 pence
2 shilling (florin)	10 pence
1 shilling	5 pence
6 pence	
21/2 pence	1 penny
2 pence	
1 penny	

1/2 penny	
1/4 penny (farthing)	

Throughout its tenure as a member of the European Union (1973–2020), Britain contemplated but did not make the change to the EU's common currency, the Euro, reflecting many Britons' strong identification of their country with its rich commercial history and view of their currency as a national symbol.

Even more challenging than sorting out the values of obsolete coins is calculating for any given period the purchasing power of money, which fluctuates over time by its very nature. As difficult as it is to generalize, it is clear that money used to be worth much more than it is currently. During the early Middle Ages, the most valuable circulating coin was the silver penny: four would buy a sheep. Beyond long-term inflationary trends, prices varied from times of plenty to those marked by poor harvests; from peacetime to wartime; from the country to the metropolis (life in London has always been very expensive); and wages varied according to the availability of labor (wages would sharply rise, for instance, during the devastating Black Death in the fourteenth century). The following chart provides a glimpse of some actual prices of given periods and their changes across time, though all the variables mentioned above prevent them from being definitive. Even from one year to the next, an added tax on gin or tea could drastically raise prices, and a lottery ticket could cost much more the night before the drawing than just a month earlier. Still, the prices quoted below do indicate important trends, such as the disparity of incomes in British society and the costs of basic commodities. In the chart on the following pages, the symbol £ is used for pound, s. for shilling, d. for a penny (from Latin *denarius*); a sum would normally be written £2.19.3—that is 2 pounds, 19 shillings, 3 pence. (This is Leopold Bloom's budget for the day depicted in Joyce's novel *Ulysses* [1922]; in the new currency, it would be about £2.96.)

circa	1390	1590	1650	1750	1815	1875
<i>food and drink</i>	gallon (8 pints) of ale, 1.5d.	tankard of beer, .5d.	coffee, 1d. a dish	"drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two-pence" (gin shop sign in Hogarth print)	ounce of laudanum, 3d.	pint of beer, 3d.
	gallon (8 pints) of wine, 3 to 4d.	pound of beef, 2s. 5d.	chicken, 1s. 4d.	dinner at a steakhouse, 1s.	ham and potato dinner for two, 7s.	dinner in a good hotel, 5s.
	pound of cinnamon, 1 to 3s.	pound of cinnamon, 10s. 6d.	pound of tea, £3 10s.	pound of tea, 16s.	bottle of French claret, 12s.	pound of tea, 2s.

<i>entertainment</i>	no cost to watch a cycle play	admission to public theater, 1 to 3d.	falcon, £11 5s.	theater tickets, 1 to 5s.	admission to Covent Garden theater, 1 to 7s.	theater tickets, 6d. to 7s.
	contributory admission to professional troupe theater	cheap seat in private theater, 6d.	billiard table, £25	admission to Vauxhall Gardens, 1s.	annual subscription to Almack's (exclusive club), 10 guineas	admission to Madam Tussaud's waxworks, 1s.
	maintenance for royal hounds at Windsor, .75d. a day	"to see a dead Indian" ( <i>The Tempest</i> 2.2.32), 1.25d. (ten "doits")	three-quarter length portrait painting, £31	lottery ticket, £20 (shares were sold)	Jane Austen's piano, 30 guineas	annual fees at a gentleman's club, 7 to 10 guineas
<i>reading</i>	cheap romance, 1s.	play quarto, 6d.	pamphlet, 1 to 6d.	issue of <i>The Gentleman's Magazine</i> , 6d.	issue of <i>Edinburgh Review</i> , 6s.	copy of the <i>Times</i> , 3d.
	a Latin Bible, 2 to £4	Shakespeare's <i>First Folio</i> (1623), £1	student Bible, 6s.	cheap edition of Milton, 2s.	membership in circulating library (3rd class), £1 4s. a year	illustrated edition of <i>Through the Looking-glass</i> , 6s.
	payment for illuminating a liturgical book, £22 9s.	Foxe's <i>Acts and Monuments</i> , 24s.	Hobbes's <i>Leviathan</i> , 8s.	Johnson's <i>Dictionary</i> , folio, 2 vols., £4 10s.	1st edition of Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , 18s.	1st edition of Trollope's <i>The Way We Live Now</i> , 2 vols., £1 1s.
<i>transportation</i>	night's supply of hay for horse, 2d.	wherry (whole boat) across Thames, 1d.	day's journey, coach, 10s.	boat across Thames, 4d.	coach ride, outside, 2 to 3d. a mile; inside, 4 to 5d. a mile	15-minute journey in a London cab, 1s. 6d.

	coach, £8	hiring a horse for a day, 12d.	coach horse, £30	coach fare, London to Edinburgh, £4 10s.	palanquin transport in Madras, 5s. a day	railway, 3rd class, London to Plymouth, 18s. 8d. (about 1d. a mile)
	quality horse, £10	hiring a coach for a day, 10s.	fancy carriage, £170	transport to America, £5	passage, Liverpool to New York, £10	passage to India, 1st class, £50
<i>clothes</i>	clothing allowance for peasant, 3s. a year	shoes with buckles, 8d.	footman's frieze coat, 15s.	working woman's gown, 6s. 6d.	checked muslin, 7s. per yard	flannel for a cheap petticoat, 1s. 3d. a yard
	shoes for gentry wearer, 4d.	woman's gloves, £1 5s.	falconer's hat, 10s.	gentleman's suit, £8	hiring a dressmaker for a pelisse, 8s.	overcoat for an Eton schoolboy, £1 1s.
	hat for gentry wearer, 10d.	fine cloak, £16	black cloth for mourning household of an earl, £100	very fine wig, £30	ladies silk stockings, 12s.	set of false teeth, £2 10s.
<i>labor/incomes</i>	hiring a skilled building worker, 4d. a day	actor's daily wage during playing season, 1s.	agricultural laborer, 6s. 5d. a week	price of enslaved boy, £32	lowest-paid sailor on Royal Navy ship, 10s. 9d. a month	seasonal agricultural laborer, 14s. a week
	wage for professional scribe, £2 3s. 4d. a year + cloak	household servant 2 to £5 a year + food, clothing	tutor to nobleman's children, £30 a year	housemaid's wage, £6 to £8 a year	contributor to <i>Quarterly Review</i> , 10 guineas per sheet	housemaid's wage, £10 to £25 a year

	minimum income to be called gentleman, £10 a year; for knighthood, 40 to £400	minimum income for eligibility for knighthood, £30 a year	Milton's salary as Secretary of Foreign Tongues, £288 a year	Boswell's allowance, £200 a year	minimum income for a "genteel" family, £100 a year	income of the "comfortable" classes, £800 and up a year
	income from land of richest magnates, £3,500 a year	income from land of average earl, £4,000 a year	Earl of Bedford's income, £8,000 a year	Duke of Newcastle's income, £40,000 a year	Mr. Darcy's income, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , £10,000	Trollope's income, £4,000 a year



# The British Baronage

The English monarchy is in principle hereditary, though at times during the Middle Ages the rules were subject to dispute. As it stands now, authority passes from parent to eldest surviving child, to siblings in order of seniority if there are no children, and in default of direct descendants to collateral lines (cousins, nephews, nieces) in order of closeness. There have been breaks in the order of succession (1066, 1399, 1688), but so far as possible the usurpers have always sought to paper over the break with a legitimate, that is, hereditary, claim. When a queen succeeds to the throne and takes a husband, he does not become king unless he is in the line of blood succession; rather, he is named prince consort, as Albert was to Victoria. He may be the father of kings, but he is not one himself.

The original Saxon nobles were the king's thanes, ealdormen, or earls, who provided the king with military service and counsel in return for booty, gifts, or landed estates. William the Conqueror, arriving from France, where feudalism was fully developed, considerably expanded this group. In addition, as the king distributed the lands of his new kingdom, he also distributed dignities to men who became known collectively as "the baronage." "Baron" in its root meaning signifies simply "man," and barons were the king's men. As the title was common, a distinction was early made between greater and lesser barons, the former gradually assuming loftier and more impressive titles. The first English "duke" was created in 1337; the title of "marquess," or "marquis" (pronounced "markwis"), followed in 1385, and "viscount" ("vyekount") in 1440. Though "earl" is the oldest title of all, an earl now comes between a marquess and a viscount in order of dignity and precedence, and the old term "baron" now designates a rank just below viscount. "Baronets" were created in 1611 as a means of raising revenue for the crown (the title could be purchased for about

£1,000); they are marginal nobility and have never sat in the House of Lords.

Kings and queens are addressed as “Your Majesty,” princes and princesses as “Your Highness,” the other hereditary nobility as “My Lord” or “Your Lordship.” Peers receive their titles either by inheritance (like Lord Byron, the sixth baron of that line) or from the monarch (like Alfred, Lord Tennyson, created 1st Baron Tennyson by Victoria). The children, even of a duke, are commoners unless they are specifically granted some other title or inherit their father’s title from him. A peerage can be forfeited by act of attainder, as for example when a lord is convicted of treason; and, when forfeited, or lapsed for lack of a successor, can be bestowed on another family. Thus in 1605 Robert Cecil was made first Earl of Salisbury in the third creation, the first creation dating from 1149, the second from 1337, the title having been in abeyance since 1539. Titles descend by right of succession and do not depend on tenure of land; thus, a title does not always indicate where a lord dwells or holds power. Indeed, noble titles do not always refer to a real place at all. At Prince Edward’s marriage in 1999, the queen created him Earl of Wessex, although the old kingdom of Wessex has had no political existence since 1066, and the name was all but forgotten until it was resurrected by Thomas Hardy as the setting of his novels. (This is perhaps but one of many ways in which the world of the aristocracy increasingly resembles the realm of literature.)

The king and queen	(These are all of the royal line.)
Prince and princess	

Duke and duchess	(These may or may not be of the royal line, but are ordinarily remote from the succession.)
Marquess and marchioness	
Earl and countess	
Viscount and viscountess	
Baron and baroness	
Baronet and lady	

Scottish peers sat in the parliament of Scotland, as English peers did in the parliament of England, till at the Act of Union (1707) Scottish peers were granted sixteen seats in the English House of Lords, to be filled by election. (In 1963, all Scottish lords were allowed to sit.) Similarly, Irish peers, when the Irish parliament was abolished in 1801, were granted the right to elect twenty-eight of their number to the House of Lords in Westminster. (Now that the Republic of Ireland is a separate nation, this no longer applies.) Women members (peeresses) were first allowed to sit in the House as nonhereditary Life Peers in 1958 (when that status was created for members of both genders); women first sat by their own hereditary right in 1963. Today the House of Lords still retains some power to influence or delay legislation, but its future is uncertain. In 1999, the hereditary peers (then amounting to 750) were reduced to 92

temporary members elected by their fellow peers. Holders of Life Peerages remain, as do senior bishops of the Church of England and high-court judges (the "Law Lords").

Below the peerage the chief title of honor is "knight." Knighthood, which is not hereditary, is generally a reward for services rendered. A knight (Sir John Black) is addressed, using his first name, as "Sir John"; his wife, using the last name, is "Lady Black"—unless she is the daughter of an earl or nobleman of higher rank, in which case she will be "Lady Arabella." The female equivalent of a knight bears the title of "Dame." Though the word *knight* itself comes from the Old English *cniht*, there is some doubt as to whether knighthood amounted to much before the arrival of the Normans. The feudal system required military service as a condition of land tenure, and a man who came to serve his king at the head of an army of tenants required a title of authority and badges of identity—hence the title of knighthood and the coat of arms. During the Crusades, when men were far removed from their land (or even sold it in order to go on crusade), more elaborate forms of fealty sprang up that soon expanded into orders of knighthood. The Templars, Hospitallers, Knights of the Teutonic Order, Knights of Malta, and Knights of the Golden Fleece were but a few of these companionships; not all of them were available at all times in England.

Gradually, with the rise of centralized government and the decline of feudal tenures, military knighthood became obsolete, and the rank largely honorific; sometimes, as under James I, it degenerated into a scheme of the royal government for making money. For hundreds of years after its establishment in the fourteenth century, the Order of the Garter was the only English order of knighthood, an exclusive courtly companionship. Then, during the late seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the nineteenth centuries, a number of additional orders were created, with names such as the Thistle, Saint Patrick, the Bath, Saint Michael, and Saint George, plus a number of special Victorian and Indian orders. They retain the terminology, ceremony, and dignity of knighthood, but the military implications are vestigial.

Although the British Empire now belongs to history, appointments to the Order of the British Empire continue to be conferred for services to that empire at home or abroad. Such honors (commonly referred to as "gongs") are granted by the monarch in New Year's and Birthday lists, but the decisions are now made by the government in power. In recent years there have been efforts to popularize and democratize the dispensation of honors, with recipients including celebrities of all types. But this does not prevent large sectors of British society from regarding both knighthood and the peerage as largely irrelevant to modern life.

# **The Royal Lines of England and Great Britain**

## ***England***

### **SAXONS and DANES**

Egbert, king of Wessex802–839

Ethelwulf, son of Egbert839–858

Ethelbald, second son of Ethelwulf858–860

Ethelbert, third son of Ethelwulf860–866

Ethelred I, fourth son of Ethelwulf866–871

Alfred the Great, fifth son of Ethelwulf871–899

Edward the Elder, son of Alfred899–924

Athelstan the Glorious, son of Edward924–940

Edmund I, third son of Edward940–946

Edred, fourth son of Edward946–955

Edwy the Fair, son of Edmund955–959

Edgar the Peaceful, second son of Edmund959–975

Edward the Martyr, son of Edgar975–978 (murdered)

Ethelred II, the Unready, second son of Edgar978–1016

Edmund II, Ironside, son of Ethelred II 1016–1016

Canute the Dane 1016–1035

Harold I, Harefoot, natural son of Canute 1035–1040

Hardecanute, son of Canute 1040–1042

Edward the Confessor, son of Ethelred II 1042–1066

Harold II, brother-in-law of Edward 1066–1066 (died in battle)

## **HOUSE OF NORMANDY**

William I, the Conqueror 1066–1087

William II, Rufus, third son of William I 1087–1100 (shot from ambush)

Henry I, Beauclerc, youngest son of William I 1100–1135

## **HOUSE OF BLOIS**

Stephen, son of Adela, daughter of William I 1135–1154

## **HOUSE OF PLANTAGENET**

Henry II, son of Geoffrey Plantagenet by Matilda, daughter of Henry I 1154–1189

Richard I, Coeur de Lion, son of Henry II 1189–1199

John Lackland, son of Henry II 1199–1216

Henry III, son of John 1216–1272

Edward I, Longshanks, son of Henry III 1272–1307

Edward II, son of Edward I 1307–1327 (deposed)

Edward III of Windsor, son of Edward II 1327–1377

Richard II, grandson of Edward III 1377–1399 (deposed)

## **HOUSE OF LANCASTER**

Henry IV, son of John of Gaunt, son of Edward III 1399–1413

Henry V, Prince Hal, son of Henry IV 1413–1422

Henry VI, son of Henry V 1422–1461 (deposed), 1470–1471 (deposed)

## **HOUSE OF YORK**

Edward IV, great-great-grandson of Edward III 1461–1470 (deposed),

1471–1483

Edward V, son of Edward IV 1483–1483 (murdered)

Richard III, Crookback 1483–1485 (died in battle)

## **HOUSE OF TUDOR**

Henry VII, married daughter of Edward IV 1485–1509

Henry VIII, son of Henry VII 1509–1547

Edward VI, son of Henry VIII 1547–1553

Mary I, “Bloody,” daughter of Henry VIII 1553–1558

Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry VIII 1558–1603



## **HOUSE OF STUART**

James I (James VI of Scotland) 1603–1625

Charles I, son of James I 1625–1649 (executed)

## **COMMONWEALTH & PROTECTORATE**

Council of State 1649–1653

Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector 1653–1658

Richard Cromwell, son of Oliver 1658–1660 (resigned)

## **HOUSE OF STUART (RESTORED)**

Charles II, son of Charles I 1660–1685

James II, second son of Charles I 1685–1688

## **(INTERREGNUM, 11 DECEMBER 1688 TO 13 FEBRUARY 1689)**

## **HOUSE OF ORANGE-NASSAU**

William III of Orange,  
by Mary, daughter of Charles II and  
Mary II, daughter of James II 1689–1701–1694

Anne, second daughter of James II 1702–1714

***Great Britain***

## **HOUSE OF HANOVER**

George I, son of Elector of Hanover and Sophia, granddaughter of James I 1714–1727

George II, son of George I 1727–1760

George III, grandson of George II 1760–1820

George IV, son of George III 1820–1830

William IV, third son of George III 1830–1837

Victoria, daughter of Edward, fourth son of George III 1837–1901

### **HOUSE OF SAXE-COBURG AND GOTHA**

Edward VII, son of Victoria 1901–1910

### **HOUSE OF WINDSOR (NAME ADOPTED 17 JULY 1917)**

George V, second son of Edward VII 1910–1936

Edward VIII, eldest son of George V 1936–1936 (abdicated)

George VI, second son of George V 1936–1952

Elizabeth II, daughter of George VI 1952–2022

Charles III, son of Elizabeth II 2022–

# Religions in Great Britain

In the late sixth century C.E., missionaries from Rome introduced Christianity to Britons—actually, reintroduced it, since it had briefly flourished in the southern parts of the British Isles during the Roman occupation, and even after the Roman withdrawal had persisted in the Celtic regions of Scotland and Wales. By the time the earliest poems included in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* were composed (the seventh century), therefore, there had been a Christian presence in the British Isles for hundreds of years. The conversion of the Germanic occupiers of England can, however, be dated only from 597. Our knowledge of the religion of pre-Christian Britain is sketchy, but it is likely that vestiges of Germanic polytheism assimilated into, or coexisted with, the practice of Christianity: fertility rites were incorporated into the celebration of Easter resurrection, rituals commemorating the dead into All-Hallows Eve and All Saints Day, and elements of winter solstice festivals into the celebration of Christmas. The most durable polytheistic remains are the days of the week, each of which except “Saturday” derives from the name of a Germanic pagan god, and the word “Easter,” deriving, according to the great monastic scholar Bede (ca. 673–735), from the name of a Germanic pagan goddess, Eostre. In English literature such “folkloric” elements sometimes elicit romantic nostalgia. Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath” looks back to a magical time before the arrival of Christianity in which the land was “fulfild of fairye.” Hundreds of years later, the seventeenth-century writer Robert Herrick honors the amalgamation of Christian and pagan elements in agrarian British culture in such poems as “Corinna’s Gone A-Maying” and “The Hock Cart.”

Medieval Christianity was fairly uniform, if complex, across Western Europe—hence called “catholic,” or universally shared. The Church was composed of the so-called “regular” and “secular” orders, the regular orders being those who followed a rule in a

community under an abbot or an abbess (that is, monks, nuns, friars, and canons), while the secular clergy of priests served parish communities under the governance of a bishop. In the unstable period from the sixth until the twelfth century, monasteries were the intellectual powerhouse of the Church. From the beginning of the thirteenth century, with the development of an urban Christian spirituality in Europe, friars dominated the recently invented institution of universities, as well as devoting themselves, in theory at least, to the urban poor.

The Catholic Church was also an international power structure. With its hierarchy of pope, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, it offered a model of the centralized, bureaucratic state from the late eleventh century. That ecclesiastical power structure coexisted alongside a separate, often less centralized and feudal structure of lay authorities, with theoretically different and often competing spheres of social responsibilities. The sharing of lay and ecclesiastical authority in medieval England was sometimes a source of conflict. Chaucer's pilgrims are on their way to visit the memorial shrine to one victim of such exemplary struggle: Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, who opposed the policies of King Henry II, was assassinated by indirect suggestion of the king in 1170, and later made a saint. The Church, in turn, produced its own victims: Jews were subject to persecution in the late twelfth century in England, before being expelled in 1290. From the beginning of the fifteenth century, the English Church targeted Lollard heretics (see below) with capital punishment, for the first time.

As an international organization, the Church conducted its business in the universal language of Latin. Thus although in the period the largest segment of literate persons was made up of clerics, the clerical contribution to great literary writing in vernacular languages (for example, French and English) was, so far as we know, relatively modest, with some great exceptions in the later Middle Ages (for example, William Langland). Lay, vernacular writers of the period certainly reflect the importance of the Church as an institution and the pervasiveness of religion in the rituals that

marked everyday life, as well as contesting institutional authority. From the late fourteenth century, indeed, England witnessed an active and articulate, proto-Protestant movement known as Lollardy, which attacked clerical hierarchy and promoted vernacular scriptures.

Beginning in 1517 the German monk Martin Luther, in Wittenberg, Germany, openly challenged many aspects of Catholic practice and by 1520 had completely repudiated the authority of the pope, setting in motion the Protestant Reformation. Luther argued that the Roman Catholic Church had strayed far from the pattern of Christianity laid out in scripture. He rejected Catholic doctrines for which no biblical authority was to be found, such as the belief in Purgatory, and translated the Bible into German, on the grounds that the importance of scripture for all Christians made its translation into the vernacular tongue essential. Luther was not the first to advance such views—Lollard followers of the Englishman John Wycliffe had translated the Bible in the late fourteenth century. But Luther, protected by powerful German rulers, was able to speak out without fear of punishment and convert others to his views, rather than suffer the persecution usually meted out to heretics. Soon other reformers were following in Luther's footsteps: of these, the Swiss Ulrich Zwingli and the French Jean Calvin would be especially influential for English religious thought.

At first England remained staunchly Catholic. Its king, Henry VIII, was so severe to heretics that the pope awarded him the title "Defender of the Faith," which British monarchs have retained to this day. In 1534, however, Henry rejected the authority of the pope to prevent his divorce from his queen, Catherine of Aragon, and his marriage to his mistress, Ann Boleyn. In doing so, Henry appropriated to himself ecclesiastical as well as secular authority. Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, was executed in 1535 for refusing to endorse Henry's right to govern the English church. Over the following six years, Henry consolidated his grip on the ecclesiastical establishment by dissolving the powerful, populous Catholic monasteries and redistributing their massive landholdings to his own

lay followers. Yet Henry's church largely retained Catholic doctrine and liturgy. When Henry died and his young son, Edward, came to the throne in 1547, the English church embarked on a more Protestant path, a direction abruptly reversed when Edward died and his older sister Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, took the throne in 1553 and attempted to reintroduce Roman Catholicism. Mary's reign was also short, however, and her successor, Elizabeth I, the daughter of Ann Boleyn, was a Protestant. Elizabeth attempted to establish a "middle way" Christianity, compromising between Roman Catholic practices and beliefs and reformed ones.

The Church of England, though it laid claim to a national rather than pan-European authority, aspired like its predecessor to be the universal church of all English subjects. It retained the Catholic structure of parishes and dioceses and the Catholic hierarchy of bishops, though the ecclesiastical authority was now the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Church's "Supreme Governor" was the monarch. Yet disagreement and controversy persisted. Some members of the Church of England wanted to retain many of the ritual and liturgical elements of Catholicism. Others, the Puritans, advocated a more thoroughgoing reformation. Most Puritans remained within the Church of England, but a minority, the "Separatists" or "Congregationalists," split from the established church altogether. These dissenters no longer thought of the ideal church as an organization to which everybody belonged; instead, they conceived it as a more exclusive group of likeminded people, one not necessarily attached to a larger body of believers.

In the seventeenth century, the succession of the Scottish king James to the English throne produced another problem. England and Scotland were separate nations, and in the sixteenth century Scotland had developed its own national Presbyterian church, or "kirk," under the leadership of the reformer John Knox. The kirk retained fewer Catholic liturgical elements than did the Church of England, and its authorities, or "presbyters," were elected by assemblies of their fellow clerics, rather than appointed by the king. James I and his son Charles I, especially the latter, wanted to bring

the Scottish kirk into conformity with Church of England practices. The Scots violently resisted these efforts, with the collaboration of many English Puritans, in a conflict that eventually developed into the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. The effect of these disputes is visible in the poetry of such writers as John Milton, Robert Herrick, Henry Vaughan, and Thomas Traherne, and in the prose of Thomas Browne, Lucy Hutchinson, and Dorothy Waugh. Just as in the mid-sixteenth century, when a succession of monarchs with different religious commitments destabilized the church, so the seventeenth century endured spiritual whiplash. King Charles I's highly ritualistic Church of England was violently overturned by the Puritan victors in the Civil War—until 1660, after the death of the Puritan leader, Oliver Cromwell, when the Church of England was restored along with the monarchy.

The religious and political upheavals of the seventeenth century produced Christian sects that de-emphasized the ceremony of the established church and rejected as well its top-down authority structure. Some of these groups were ephemeral, but the Baptists (founded in 1608 in Amsterdam by the English expatriate John Smyth) and Quakers, or Society of Friends (founded by George Fox in the 1640s), flourished outside the established church, sometimes despite cruel persecution. John Bunyan, a Baptist, wrote the Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison. Some dissenters, like the Baptists, shared the reformed reverence for the absolute authority of scripture but interpreted the scriptural texts differently from their fellow Protestants. Others, like the Quakers, favored, even over the authority of the Bible, the "inner light" or voice of individual conscience, which they took to be the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals.

The Protestant dissenters were not England's only religious minorities. Despite crushing fines and the threat of imprisonment, a minority of Catholics under Elizabeth and James openly refused to give their allegiance to the new church, and others remained secret adherents to the old ways. John Donne was brought up in an ardently Catholic family, and several other writers converted to

Catholicism as adults—Ben Jonson for a considerable part of his career, Elizabeth Carey and Richard Crashaw permanently, and at profound personal cost. In the eighteenth century, Catholics remained objects of suspicion as possible agents of sedition, especially after the “Glorious Revolution” in 1688 deposed the Catholic James II in favor of the Protestant William and Mary. Anti-Catholic prejudice affected John Dryden, a Catholic convert, as well as the lifelong Catholic Alexander Pope. By contrast, the English colony of Ireland remained overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, the fervor of its religious commitment at least partly inspired by resistance to English occupation. Starting in the reign of Elizabeth, England shored up its own authority in Ireland by encouraging Protestant immigrants from Scotland to settle in the north of Ireland, producing a virulent religious divide the effects of which are still felt today.

A small community of Jews had moved from France to London after 1066, when the Norman William the Conqueror came to the English throne. Although despised and persecuted by many Christians, they were allowed to remain as moneylenders to the Crown, until the thirteenth century, when the king developed alternative sources of credit. At this point, in 1290, the Jews were expelled from England. In 1655 Oliver Cromwell permitted a few to return, and in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Jewish population slowly increased, mainly by immigration from Germany. In the mid-eighteenth century some prominent Jews had their children brought up as Christians so as to facilitate their full integration into English society: thus the nineteenth-century writer and politician Benjamin Disraeli, although he and his father were members of the Church of England, was widely considered a Jew insofar as his ancestry was Jewish.

In the late seventeenth century, as the Church of England reasserted itself, Catholics, Jews, and dissenting Protestants found themselves subject to significant legal restrictions. The Corporation Act, passed in 1661, and the Test Act, passed in 1673, excluded all who refused to take communion in the Church of England from



voting, attending university, or working in government or in the professions. Members of religious minorities, as well as Church of England communicants, paid mandatory taxes in support of Church of England ministers and buildings. In 1689 the dissenters gained the right to worship in public, but Jews and Catholics were not permitted to do so.

During the eighteenth century, political, intellectual, and religious history remained closely intertwined. The Church of England came to accommodate a good deal of variety. "Low church" services resembled those of the dissenting Protestant churches, minimizing ritual and emphasizing the sermon; the "high church" retained more elaborate ritual elements, yet its prestige was under attack on several fronts. Many Enlightenment thinkers subjected the Bible to rational critique and found it wanting: the philosopher David Hume, for instance, argued that the "miracles" described therein were more probably lies or errors than real breaches of the laws of nature. Within the Church of England, the "broad church" Latitudinarians welcomed this rationalism, advocating theological openness and an emphasis on ethics rather than dogma. More radically, the Unitarian movement rejected the divinity of Christ while professing to accept his ethical teachings. Taking a different tack, the preacher John Wesley, founder of Methodism, responded to the rationalists' challenge with a newly fervent call to evangelism and personal discipline; his movement was particularly successful in Wales. Revolutions in America and France at the end of the century generated considerable millenarian excitement and fostered more new religious ideas, often in conjunction with a radical social agenda. Many important writers of the Romantic period were indebted to traditions of protestant dissent: Unitarian and rationalist protestant ideas influenced William Hazlitt, Anna Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge. William Blake created a highly idiosyncratic poetic mythology loosely indebted to radical strains of Christian mysticism. Others were even more heterodox: Lord Byron and Robert Burns, brought up as Scots

Presbyterians, rebelled fiercely, and Percy Shelley's writing of an atheistic pamphlet resulted in his expulsion from Oxford.

Great Britain never erected an American-style "wall of separation" between church and state, but in practice religion and secular affairs grew more and more distinct during the nineteenth century. In consequence, members of religious minorities no longer seemed to pose a threat to the commonweal. A movement to repeal the Test Act failed in the 1790s, but a renewed effort resulted in the extension of the franchise to dissenting Protestants in 1828 and to Catholics in 1829. The numbers of Roman Catholics in England were swelled by immigration from Ireland, but there were also some prominent English adherents. Among writers, the converts John Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins are especially important. The political participation and social integration of Jews presented a thornier challenge. Lionel de Rothschild, repeatedly elected to represent London in Parliament during the 1840s and 1850s, was not permitted to take his seat there because he refused to take his oath of office "on the true faith of a Christian"; finally, in 1858, the Jewish Disabilities Act allowed him to omit these words. Only in 1871, however, were Oxford and Cambridge opened to non-Anglicans.

Meanwhile geological discoveries and Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories increasingly cast doubt on the literal truth of the Creation story, and close philological analysis of the biblical text suggested that its origins were human rather than divine. By the end of the nineteenth century, many writers were bearing witness to a world in which Christianity no longer seemed fundamentally plausible. In his poetry and prose, Thomas Hardy depicts a world devoid of benevolent providence. Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is in part an elegy to lost spiritual assurance, as the "Sea of Faith" goes out like the tide: "But now I only hear / Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar / Retreating." For Arnold, literature must replace religion as a source of spiritual truth, and intimacy between individuals substitute for the lost communal solidarity of the universal church.

The work of many twentieth-century writers shows the influence of a religious upbringing or a religious conversion in adulthood. T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden embrace Anglicanism, William Butler Yeats spiritualism. James Joyce repudiates Irish Catholicism but remains obsessed with it. Yet religion, or lack of it, is a matter of individual choice and conscience, not social or legal mandate. Over the past several decades, church attendance has plummeted in Great Britain. Only about 46 percent of the population identified itself as “Christian” on the 2021 census. Meanwhile, immigration from former British colonies as well as other countries has swelled the ranks of religions once uncommon in the British Isles—Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist—though the numbers of adherents remain small relative to the total population.

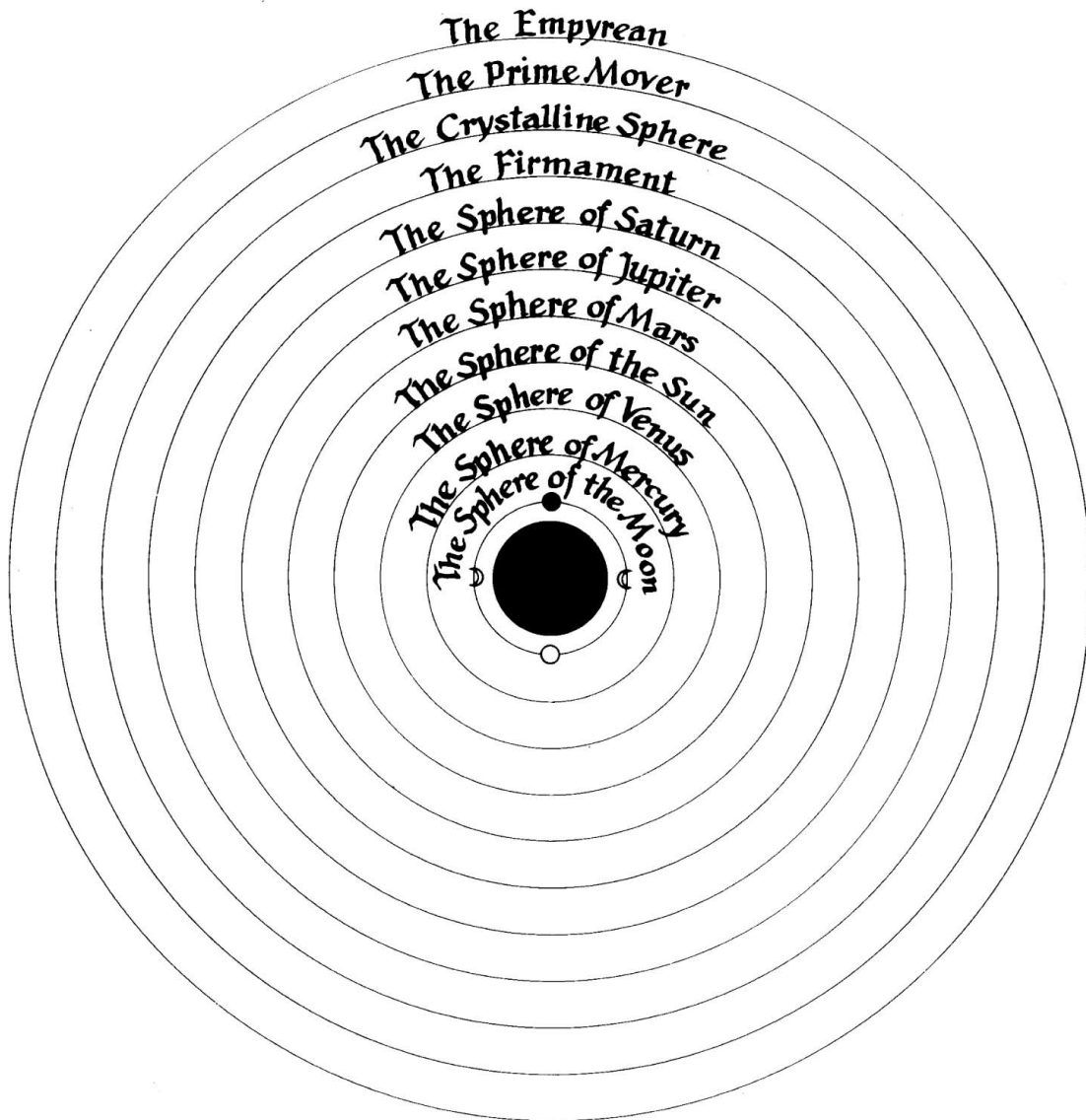
# The Universe According to Ptolemy

Ptolemy was a Roman astronomer of Greek descent, born in Egypt during the second century C.E.; for nearly fifteen hundred years after his death his account of the design of the universe was accepted as standard. During that time, the basic pattern underwent many detailed modifications and was fitted out with many astrological and pseudoscientific trappings. But in essence Ptolemy's followers portrayed the earth as the center of the universe, with the sun, planets, and fixed stars set in transparent spheres orbiting around it. In this scheme of things, as modified for Christian usage, Hell was usually placed under the earth's surface at the center of the cosmic globe, while Heaven, the abode of the blessed spirits, was in the outermost, uppermost circle, the empyrean. But in 1543 the Polish astronomer Copernicus proposed an alternative hypothesis—that the earth rotates around the sun, not vice versa; and despite theological opposition, observations with the new telescope and careful mathematical calculations insured ultimate acceptance of the new view.

The map of the Ptolemaic universe below is a simplified version of a diagram in Peter Apian's *Cosmography* (1584). In such a diagram, the Firmament is the sphere that contained the fixed stars; the Crystalline Sphere, which contained no heavenly bodies, is a late innovation, included to explain certain anomalies in the observed movement of the heavenly bodies; and the Prime Mover is the sphere that, itself put into motion by God, imparts rotation around the earth to all the other spheres.

Milton, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, used two universes. The Copernican universe, though he alludes to it, was too large, formless, and unfamiliar to be the setting for the war between Heaven and Hell in *Paradise Lost*. He therefore used the Ptolemaic cosmos, but placed Heaven well outside this smaller earth-centered

universe, Hell far beneath it, and assigned the vast middle space to Chaos.



# **PERMISSIONS ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

# PERMISSIONS ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## TEXT CREDITS

**Ancrene Wisse:** “The Sweetness and Pains of Enclosure” from THE ANCRENE WISSE: GUIDE FOR ANCHORESSES, A TRANSLATION, translated Bella Millett. Copyright © 2009. Reprinted by permission of the Liverpool University Press through PLSclear.

**Beowulf:** From BEOWULF, translated by Seamus Heaney. Copyright © 2000 by Seamus Heaney. Used with permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

**Geoffrey Chaucer:** All excerpts are from THE NORTON CHAUCER, edited by David Lawton. Copyright © 2019 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. *The Parliament of Birds*, translated by James Simpson. Copyright © 2016 by James Simpson. Reprinted by permission of the translator.

**Clemence of Barking:** “The Clemence of Barking” from *The Life of Saint Catherine* from VIRGIN LIVES AND HOLY DEATHS: TWO **EXEMPLARY** BIOGRAPHIES FOR ANGLO-NORMAN WOMEN, translated by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Glyn S. Burgess. Copyright © 1996. Reprinted by permission of The Orion Publishing Group Ltd. on behalf of the publisher, Everyman through PLSclear.

**Dream of the Rood:** Translated by Alfred David. Copyright © 2012 by Alfred David. Reprinted by permission of the translator.

**Early Irish Lyrics:** From EARLY IRISH LYRICS, edited and translated by Gerard Murphy, Four Courts Press, 1998. Reproduced with permission from Gerard Murphy and Four Courts Press.

**Richard Hamer:** "The Ruin," "Wulf and Eadwacer," "Riddle #21," "Riddle #26," and "Riddle #47" from A CHOICE OF ANGLO-SAXON VERSE: SELECTED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND A PARALLEL VERSE TRANSLATION, by Richard Hamer. Copyright © 1970 by Richard Hamer. Reprinted with permission of Faber and Faber Limited.

**Robert Henryson:** *The Cock and the Jasper* from THE TESTAMENT OF CRESSEID AND SEVEN FABLES by Robert Henryson, translated by Seamus Heaney. Copyright © 2009 by Seamus Heaney. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, and Faber and Faber Limited.

**Thomas Hoccleve:** "My Complaint" from 'MY COMPLEINTE' AND OTHER POEMS by Thomas Hoccleve, edited by Roger Ellis, 2001. ISBN 978 0 85989 701 3. Reprinted by permission of the Liverpool University Press through PLSclear.

**Judith:** From OLD & MIDDLE ENGLISH, translated by Elaine Treharne. Reprinted with the permission of the translator.

**Julian of Norwich:** Excerpts reprinted from Julian of Norwich, A BOOK OF SHOWINGS, edited by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, by permission of the publisher. Copyright © 1978 by the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto.

**Margery Kempe:** All excerpts including bibliographical citation excerpts from THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE, edited by Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications). Copyright © 1996 by the Board of The Medieval Institute. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.



**William Langland:** Excerpts from *PIERS PLOWMAN: AN ALLITERATIVE VERSE TRANSLATION* by William Langland, translated by E. Talbot Donaldson. Translation copyright © 1990 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

***La Folie Tristan:*** From *THE BIRTH OF ROMANCE: AN ANTHOLOGY*, edited and translated by Judith Weiss. Copyright © 1992 by Judith Weiss.

**Layamon:** Excerpts from Layamon's *BRUT*, translated by Rosamund Allen. Copyright © Rosamund Allen. Reprinted by permission of The Orion Publishing Group Ltd. on behalf of the publisher, Everyman through PLSclear.

**John Mandeville:** From *THE BOOK OF JOHN MANDEVILLE*, edited by Tamarah Kohanski and C. David Benson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), [pp. 21–23](#), 54, 55–56, 62, 66–67, 71, 76–77, 94–95. Reprinted with permission.

**Marie de France:** "Lanval," "Laüstic," "Bisclavret," "Milun," and "Chevrefoil" from *THE LAIS OF MARIE DE FRANCE*, translated by Robert W. Hanning and Joan M. Ferrante. Copyright © 1978. Used by permission of Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group.

**Meir Ben Elijah of Norwich:** "Put a curse on my enemy," from *Meir b. Elijah of Norwich: Persecution and Poetry Among Medieval English Jews* by Susan L. Einbinder from *The Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 26, Issue 2. Copyright © 2000 by Taylor & Francis. Reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd.

***The Owl and the Nightingale:*** "The Owl and the Nightingale," from *THE OWL AND THE NIGHTINGALE: A NEW VERSE TRANSLATION*, translated by Simon Armitage. Copyright © 2022 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight:*** From SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT: A NEW VERSE TRANSLATION, translated by Simon Armitage. Copyright © 2007 by Simon Armitage. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. and Faber and Faber Limited.

**Thomas of England:** From LE ROMAN DE TRISTAN, edited by Gottfried von Strassburg, translated by A. T. Hatto. Copyright © 1960 by A. T. Hatto. Reprinted by permission of Penguin Random House UK. All rights reserved.

***The Wanderer:*** translated by Alfred David. Copyright © 2012 by Alfred David. Reprinted by permission of the translator.

***The Wife's Lament:*** translated by Alfred David. Copyright © 2012 by Alfred David. Reprinted by permission of the translator.

## IMAGE CREDITS

[Pages: 2–3](#): © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/Bridgeman Images; [p. 11](#): © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/Bridgeman Images; [p. 13](#): Universal History Archive/UIG/Bridgeman Images; [p. 17](#): GRANGER; [p. 20](#): Keith Corrigan/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 33](#): Hugh McKean/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 38](#): © British Library Board/Robana/Art Resource, NY; [p. 39](#): © The Trustees of the British Museum/Art Resource, NY; [p. 142](#): © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/Bridgeman Images; [p. 191](#): © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY; [p. 211](#): The Morgan Library & Museum/Art Resource, NY; [p. 221](#): © DeA Picture Library/Art Resource, NY; [p. 288](#): British Library/GRANGER; [p. 377](#): IanDagnall Computing/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 378](#): PAINTING/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 413](#): agefotostock/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 440](#): Smith Archive/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 468](#): incamerastock/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 472](#): mssEL 26 C 9, Egerton family papers, Ellesmere, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California; [p. 512](#): Bridgeman Images; [p. 589](#): © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/Bridgeman Images.

## COLOR INSERT CREDITS

[C1](#): © The Trustees of the British Museum/Art Resource, NY; [C2](#): © British Library Board/Robana/Art Resource, NY; [C3](#): British Library/GRANGER; [C4](#): top: National Library of Scotland (Adv.MS.19.2.1); bottom: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, photo © Josse/Bridgeman Images; [C5](#): © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY; [C6 top](#): GRANGER; bottom: Corpus Christi College, Oxford, UK/Bridgeman Images; [C7 top](#): Universal History Archive/UIG/Bridgeman Images; bottom: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/Bridgeman Images; [C8 top](#): © Musée Condé, Chantilly/Bridgeman Images; bottom: Louvre/Bridgeman Images.

# PERMISSIONS ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## TEXT CREDITS

**Queen Elizabeth:** *On Monsieur's Departure* from THE POEMS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH I, edited by Leicester Bradner. Copyright © 1964 by Brown University. Reprinted by permission of the University Press of New England. *Letter to Sir Amyes Paulet* and *Letter to King James VI of Scotland* from THE LETTERS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH, edited by G. B. Harrison (Cassell, 1935). Reprinted by permission of David Higham Associates. *The Golden Speech* from THE PUBLIC SPEAKING OF QUEEN ELIZABETH: SELECTIONS FROM HER OFFICIAL ADDRESSES, edited by George P. Rice, Jr. (AMS Press, 1966). Reprinted with the permission of AMS Press, Inc.

**Lucy Hutchinson:** From THE WORKS OF LUCY HUTCHINSON, Vol. 1, THE TRANSLATION OF LUCRETIVS, edited by Reid Barbour and David Norbrook, and from THE WORKS OF LUCY HUTCHINSON: THE TRANSLATION OF LUCRETIVS (electronic resource). Copyright © 2012 by Oxford University Press. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear. "Elegy 7 (To the Garden at Owthorpe)" by Lucy Hutchinson, from "Lucy Hutchinson's 'Elegies' and the Situation of the Republican Woman Writer" by David Norbrook, from *English Literary Renaissance*, Volume 27, Number 3, Autumn 1997. Copyright © University of Chicago Press. Permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

**Ben Johnson:** "The Masque of Blackness" by Ben Johnson, from COURT MASQUES: JACOBEAN AND CAROLINE ENTERTAINMENTS, edited by David Lindley, Michael Corder, Peter Holland, and Martin

Wiggins. Copyright © 1995 by Oxford University Press. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

**John Milton:** Excerpts from *Areopagitica* from THE COMPLETE POETRY AND MAJOR PROSE OF MILTON, edited by Merritt Y. Hughes, copyright © 1957. Reprinted by permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ. From PARADISE LOST: A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION by John Milton, edited by Gordon Teskey. Copyright © 2005 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

**Sir Thomas More:** "Entire text," from UTOPIA: A Norton Critical Edition, Second Edition, by Sir Thomas More, translated by Robert M. Adams. Copyright © 1992, 1975 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

**Petrarch:** Reprinted by permission of the publisher from PETRARCH'S LYRIC POEMS: THE *RIME SPARSE* AND OTHER LYRICS, translated and edited by Robert M. Durling, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. Copyright © 1976 by Robert M. Durling.

**Katherine Philips:** *A Married State* from NLW Orielton Collection, box 24. Courtesy of The National Library of Wales.

**Hester Pulter:** "Upon the Death of my Dear and Lovely Daughter, Jane Pulter," "Emblem 40 (View But this Tulip)," "Dear God, From Thy High Throne Look Down" from THE PULTER PROJECT: POET IN THE MAKING (2018), general editors Leah Knight and Wendy Wall, <http://pulterproject.northwestern.edu>. Copyright © 2023 by Wendy Wall, Leah Knight, Northwestern University, others. This site is licensed under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 License.

**William Shakespeare:** "The Tempest." Copyright © 2015 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. "Sir Thomas More," edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Holger Schott Syme, from THE NORTON SHAKESPEARE, THIRD EDITION, edited by Stephen Greenblatt. Copyright © 2015,

2008, 1997 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

**Sir Philip Sidney:** “The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia” by Sir Philip Sidney, from THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, TENTH EDITION, Vol. B, edited by Stephen Greenblatt. Copyright 2018, 2012, 2006, 2000, 1993, 1990, 1986, 1974, 1968, 1962 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

**Captain John Smith:** From CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH: A SELECTED EDITION OF HIS WRITINGS, edited by Karen Ordahl Kupperman. Published for the Omohundo Institute of Early American History and Culture. Copyright © 1988 by the University of North Carolina Press. Used by permission of the publisher. [www.uncpress.org](http://www.uncpress.org).

**Mary Wroth:** From THE POEMS OF LADY MARY WROTH, edited by Josephine A. Roberts. Copyright © 1992. Reprinted by permission of Louisiana State University Press.

## IMAGE CREDITS

[Pages 2–3](#): © akg-images/Album/Prisma; [p. 7](#): imageBROKER/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 9](#): Science History Images/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 11](#): artist unknown/from *Fierie Tryall of God’s Saints* (1611); [p. 16](#): Chronicle of World History/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 18](#): Historic Images/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 22](#): The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1950. 50.69.2; [p. 25](#): © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY; [p. 30](#): © London Metropolitan Archives/Bridgeman Images; [p. 33](#): Private Collection/Bridgeman Images; [p. 72](#): history\_docu\_photo/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 145](#): Houghton Library/Harvard; [p. 158](#): Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 202](#): Library of Congress Rare Books/Cookbooks; [p. 218](#): Royal Collection Trust/© His Majesty King Charles III, 2023/Bridgeman Images; [p. 220](#): Bibliothèque Nationale de France; [p. 229](#): Photo by The Art Archive/Shutterstock; [p. 231](#): GL Archive/Alamy Stock Photo;

[p. 258](#): Timewatch Images/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 475](#): Album/British Library/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 494](#): British Library/GRANGER; [p. 505](#): Commonplace Book, Mid-17th Century. James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; [p. 622](#): sketch from 1596 via Wikimedia Commons; [p. 641](#): Private Collection © Archives Charmet/Bridgeman Images; [p. 788](#): College of Arms MS Misc. Grants 1, fol. 148v. Reproduced by permission of the Kings, Heralds and Pursuivants of Arms; [p. 827](#): Virginia Museum of History & Culture/Alamy Stock Photo; [pp. 848–49](#): Album/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 855](#): Chronicle/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 859](#): Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 870](#): The Print Collector/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 872](#): Iconographic Archive/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 875](#): Historic Collection/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 883](#): GRANGER; [p. 898](#): compass sketch, Folger MS V.a.345 [p. 44](#). Digital Image File Name: 68715 Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library; [p. 924](#): Victoria & Albert Museum, UK/Bridgeman Images; [p. 942](#): GRANGER; [p. 944](#): Reading Room 2020/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 1058](#): PRISMA ARCHIVO/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 1068](#): The Picture Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 1070](#): *The Countess of Montgomerie's Urania* frontispiece. Digital Image File Name: 3361 Source Call Number: STC 26051 Copy, used by permission from the Folger Shakespeare Library; [p. 1159](#): George Wither's book (1635); [p. 1181](#): Reading Room 2020/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 1213](#): Reading Room 2020/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 1215](#): Adam Eastland/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 1237](#): Wellcome Library, London. Wellcome Images, [images@wellcome.ac.uk](mailto:images@wellcome.ac.uk) <http://wellcomeimages.org>. Four faces displaying the adaptation of non-western apparel upon western fashion by J.B. sirnamed, the Chirosopher John Bulwer, Published: 1653 CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>; [p. 1240](#): Smith Archive/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 1283](#): GRANGER; [p. 1311](#): Album/British Library/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 1340](#): © British Library Board/Robana/Art Resource, NY; [p. 1368](#): World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 1378](#): Historic Images/Alamy Stock Photo.

## COLOR INSERT CREDITS

C1: © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY; C2: top: National Portrait Gallery, UK/Bridgeman Images; bottom: National Portrait Gallery, UK/Bridgeman Images; C3: top: © The Trustees of the British Museum/Art Resource, NY; bottom: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands/Bridgeman Images; C4: © Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham; C5: top left: Gift of Mrs. Edward S. Harkness, 1928. The Metropolitan Museum of Art; top right: Gift of Mrs. Edward S. Harkness, 1928. The Metropolitan Museum of Art; C5: bottom: National Portrait Gallery, UK/Bridgeman Images; C6: top: V&A Images, London/Art Resource, NY; bottom: Private Collection, The Stapleton Collection/Bridgeman Images; C7: World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo; C8: top: Photo 12/Alamy Stock Photo; bottom: Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 1926.554. The Cleveland Museum of Art; C9: Scala/Art Resource, NY; C10: top: National Portrait Gallery, UK/Bridgeman Images; bottom: The Picture Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo; C11: Woburn Abbey, UK/Bridgeman Images; C12: left: The Picture Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo; right: Reproduced by permission of Chatsworth Settlement Trustees/Bridgeman Images; C13: top: Royal Collection Trust/© His Majesty King Charles III, 2023/Bridgeman Images; C13: bottom: Private Collection/Bridgeman Images; C14: © Tate, London/Art Resource, NY; C15: Royal Collection Trust/© His Majesty King Charles III, 2023/Bridgeman Images; C16: top: National Portrait Gallery, UK/Bridgeman Images; bottom: © Leeds Museums and Galleries, UK/Bridgeman Images.



# PERMISSIONS ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## TEXT CREDITS

**Aphra Behn:** *The Complete Text of OROONOKO*, edited by Joanna Lipking. Copyright © 1993 by Joanna Lipking and W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

**Thomas Gray:** From the manuscript of *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. Transcribed by kind permission of the Provost and Fellows of Eton College.

**Jupiter Hammon:** From the article "An Essay on Slavery: An Unpublished Poem by Jupiter Hammon" by Cedrick May and Julie McCown, first published by the University of North Carolina Press in *Early American Literature*, Volume 48, Number 2, 2013. Used by permission of the publisher. [www.uncpress.org](http://www.uncpress.org).

**Samuel Johnson:** Excerpt from the manuscript of *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. Reprinted with permission.

**Lady Mary Wortley Montagu:** Poems from LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU, *ESSAYS AND POEMS*, 1977, Revised 1993, edited by R. Halsband and I. Grundy. Reprinted with permission.

**Samuel Pepys:** Excerpts from THE DIARY OF SAMUEL PEPYS, 11 volumes, edited by Robert Latham and William Matthews. Copyright © 1972, 1986 by The Master, Fellows and Scholars of Magdalen College, Cambridge, Robert Latham, and the Executors of William

Matthews. Copyright © 2000 by the Regents of the University of California. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. and Peters Fraser and Dunlop.

**Alexander Pope:** From the manuscript of AN ESSAY ON MAN, MS Eng 233.21, transcribed by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

**Christopher Smart:** *My Cat Jeoffry* from JUBILATE AGNO, edited by W. H. Bond. Copyright © 1954 by W. H. Bond. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.

## IMAGE CREDITS

Pages: 2–3: Bridgeman-Giraudon/Art Resource, NY; [p. 13](#): Photo 12/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 17](#): The Picture Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 27](#): Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University (1764 book, *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole); [p. 94](#): MET/BOT/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 105](#): World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 139](#): Album/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 195](#): © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS/Getty; [p. 326](#): Bridgeman Images; [p. 343](#): Antiqua Print Gallery/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 383](#): The Picture Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo; 422: AF Fotografie/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 465](#): AF Fotografie/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 641](#): bpk Bildagentur/Art Resource, NY; [p. 671](#): World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 676](#): Science History Images/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 720](#) top: MET/BOT/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 720](#) bottom: piemags/DCM/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 721](#) top: Penta Springs Limited/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 721](#) bottom: Penta Springs Limited/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 722](#) top: Universal Images Group North America LLC/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 722](#) bottom: Universal Images Group North America LLC/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 723](#) top: Archivart/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 723](#) bottom: Archivart/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 724](#) top: Universal Images Group North America LLC /Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 724](#) bottom: Universal Images Group North America LLC /Alamy Stock Photo; [p.](#)

[725](#) top: World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 725](#) bottom: World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 773](#): Bridgeman Images; [p. 810](#): From the 1787 book: *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia, a tale, in two volumes*; [p. 914](#): The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens; [p. 927](#): © Archives Charmet/Bridgeman Images; [p. 928](#): The Picture Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 946](#): © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London/Bridgeman Images; [p. 947](#): © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London/Bridgeman Images; [p. 986](#): Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.; [p. 1048](#): Science History Images/Alamy Stock Photo; [p. 1081](#): Bridgeman Images.

## **COLOR INSERT CREDITS**

C1: © Museum of London/Bridgeman Images; C2: top: © Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives/Bridgeman Images; bottom: © Natural History Museum, London/Bridgeman Images; C3: top: Bridgeman Images; bottom: Theatre Royal, Bath/Bridgeman Images; C4 © Tate, London/ArtResource, NY; C5: top: Bridgeman-Giraudon/Art Resource, NY; bottom: Private Collection, Phillips, Fine Art Auctioneers/Bridgeman Images; C6: top: Heritage Image Partnership Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo; bottom: The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens; C7: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection; C8: top: V&A Images/Alamy Stock Photo; bottom: CPA Media Pte Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo.

# Index

# Index

A cock one time, with feathers pert and bright, [679](#)

Adam, scriveyn, if ever it thee bifalle, [575](#)

*Adam Lay Bound*, [219](#)

Adam lay ybounden, bounden in a bond, [219](#)

After that harvest inned had his sheaves, [590](#)

**Alfred**, [118](#)

*Alison*, [601](#)

A moth ate words; a marvelous event, [131](#)

*Ancrene Wisse* (Guide for Anchoresses), [206](#)

A povre widow somdel stape in age, [556](#)

Attend to what I intend to tell you, [34](#)

*Balade de bon conseyl*, [574](#)

**Bede**, [30](#)

*Beowulf*, [37](#)

*Bisclavret*, [647](#)

Bitweene Merch and Averil, [601](#)

*Book of John Mandeville, The*, [320](#)

*Book of Margery Kempe, The*, [233](#)

*Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich, A*, [222](#)

*Brut*, [140](#)

By that the Manciple had his tale all ended, [570](#)

Cædmon's *Hymn*, [31](#)

*Canterbury Tales, The*, [471](#)

**Chaucer, Geoffrey**, [467](#), [660](#)

*Chaucer's Retraction*, [572](#)

*Chaucer's Words to Adam Sciveyn*, [575](#)

*Chevrefoil*, [187](#)

**Clemence of Barking**, [210](#)

*Cock and the Jasper, The*, [679](#)

*Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse, The*, [575](#)

*Corpus Christi Carol, The*, [219](#)

*Croxton Play of the Sacrament, The*, [329](#)

*Cuckoo Song, The*, [600](#)

*Dream of the Rood, The*, [33](#)

*Ecclesiastical History of the English People, An*, [31](#)

*Envoy*, [575](#)

*Everyman*, [622](#)

Experience, though no authority, [513](#)

Flee from the press, and dwell with soothfastnesse, [574](#)

*Foweles in the Frith*, [601](#)

Full of sorrow, I shall make this song, [126](#)

*General Prologue, The (The Canterbury Tales)*, [473](#)

**Geoffrey of Monmouth**, [140](#)

**Gower, John**, [576](#)

Harkneth to me both old and ying, [293](#)

**Henryson, Robert**, [678](#)

*History of the Kings of Britain, The*, [140](#)

**Hoccleve, Thomas**, [589](#)

*I Am of Ireland*, [602](#)

Ich am of Irlonde, [602](#)

If no love is, O God, what feel I so?, [574](#)

In a summer season when the sun was mild, [379](#)

I shall tell you an adventure, [184](#)

I shall tell you the adventure of another *lai*, [171](#)

I should like very much, [187](#)

*I Sing of a Maiden*, [218](#)

It is as though my people have been given, [125](#)

*Judith*, [110](#)

**Julian of Norwich**, [220](#)

**Kempe, Margery**, [232](#)

*King of Tars, The*, [292](#)

*Lady of the Fountain, The*, [143](#)

**Langland, William**, [376](#)

*Lanval*, [171](#)

*Laüstic*, [184](#)

**Layamon**, [140](#)

*Life of Saint Catherine, The*, [211](#)

*Lord of Creation, The*, [137](#)

*Lover's Confession, The*, [578](#)

Lully, lullay, lully, lullay, [219](#)

*Madness of Tristan, The*, [195](#)

**Malory, Sir Thomas**, [603](#)

*Man of Law's Epilogue, The*, [510](#)

**Marie de France**, [159](#), [646](#)

**Meir of Norwich (Meir ben Elijah)**, [289](#)

*Miller's Prologue and Tale, The*, [494](#)

*Milun*, [160](#)



*Morte Darthur*, [604](#)

My beak points downwards, and I travel low, [130](#)

*My Complaint*, [590](#)

*My Hand Is Weary with Writing*, [137](#)

*My Lief Is Faren in Londe*, [602](#)

Now gooth sunne under wode, [218](#)

Now list, my son, and thou shalt hear, [578](#)

*Nun's Priest's Tale, The*, [556](#)

"Often the lone-dweller longs for relief, [122](#)

Once the siege and assault of Troy had ceased, [415](#)

One summer's day I overheard, [654](#)

Oure Hoste gan to swear as he were wood, [541](#)

Our Host upon his stirrups stood anon, [511](#)

*Owl and the Nightingale, The*, [653](#)

*Pardoner's Prologue and Tale, The*, [540](#)

*Parliament of Birds, The*, [661](#)

*Parson's Prologue and Tale, The*, [570](#)

*Pastoral Care*, [119](#)

*Put a Curse on My Enemy*, [290](#)

*Riddles*, [129](#)

*Roman de Brut*, [140](#)

*Roman de Tristan, Le*, [192](#)

*Ruin, The*, [128](#)

*Scholar and His Cat, The*, [136](#)

*Scribe in the Woods, The*, [137](#)

*Second Shepherds' Play, The*, [257](#)

Since I am undertaking to compose *lais*, [647](#)

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, [412](#)

*Sir Orfeo*, [363](#)

So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by, [42](#)

Some enemy deprived me of my life, [130](#)

Splendid this rampart is, though fate destroyed it, [128](#)

Sumer is ycomen in, [600](#)

*Sunset on Calvary*, [218](#)

The life so short, the craft so long to learn, [661](#)

Therefore, thou Vache, leave thyn old wrecched, [575](#)

**Thomas of England**, [190](#)

To you, my purse, and to no other wight, [575](#)

*Troilus's Song*, [574](#)

*Vision of Piers Plowman, The*, [379](#)

**Wace, [140](#)**

*Wanderer, The, [121](#)*

We reden oft and finden ywrite, [363](#)

*Western Wind, [602](#)*

Westron wind, when will thou blow?, [602](#)

*What is he, this lordling, that cometh from the fight, [217](#)*

When that April with his shoures soote, [474](#)

When that the Knight had thus his tale ytold, [494](#)

Whoever wants to tell a variety of stories, [160](#)

*Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, The, [512](#)*

*Wife's Lament, The, [126](#)*

*Wolf's Sermon to the English, [132](#)*

*Wulf and Eadwacer, [124](#)*

**Wulfstan of York, [131](#)**

*Ye That Pasen by the Weye, [218](#)*

*York Play of the Crucifixion, The, [248](#)*

# Index

A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant rears, [1182](#)

*Acts and Monuments*, [157](#)

Adieu, farewell, earth's bliss, [497](#)

*Advancement of Learning, The*, [1169](#)

*Affliction (1)*, [1184](#)

*Affliction (IV)*, [1191](#)

*Air and Angels*, [890](#)

Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there, [635](#)

*Alas! So All Things Now Do Hold Their Peace*, [136](#)

*All Married Men Desire to Have Good Wives*, [510](#)

All you that have indulgent parents been, [1228](#)

*Altar, The*, [1182](#)

A married state affords but little ease, [1259](#)

*Ambassadorial Dispatch to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, An*,  
[205](#)

Am I thus conquered? Have I lost the powers, [1075](#)

*Amoretti*, [452](#)

*And If I Did, What Then?*, [492](#)

And now th' art set wide ope, the spear's sad art, [1213](#)

**Anger, Jane,** [253](#)

*Another Grace for a Child,* [1227](#)

*Answer to Another Persuading a Lady to Marriage, An,* [1260](#)

*Apparition, The,* [896](#)

*Areopagitica,* [1409](#)

*Argument of His Book, The,* [1220](#)

As an unperfect actor on the stage, [628](#)

**Ascham, Roger,** [171](#)

As I in hoary winter's night stood shivering in the snow, [171](#)

*As in Some Countries Far Remote from Hence,* [493](#)

**Askew, Anne,** [154](#)

*Astrophil and Stella,* [540](#)

As virtuous men pass mildly away, [897](#)

A sweet disorder in the dress, [1221](#)

At court I met it, in clothes brave enough, [1049](#)

At London, sink of sin, as at the fount, [498](#)

At the round earth's imagined corners, blow, [911](#)

*Author's Epitaph, Made by Himself, The,* [479](#)

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones, [1426](#)

A ward, and still in bonds, one day, [1201](#)

A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted, [627](#)

Aye, beshrew you, by my fay, [39](#)

Back and side go bare, go bare, [475](#)

**Bacon, Anne Cooke,** [159](#), [248](#)

**Bacon, Francis,** [1156](#)

*Bait, The,* [895](#)

**Barnfield, Richard,** [490](#)

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you, [913](#)

Because you have thrown off your prelate lord, [1424](#)

*Bella Bona-Roba, La,* [1235](#)

*Bermudas,* [1267](#)

Betwixt two ridges of plowed land lay Wat, [1359](#)

*Black Patch on Lucasta's Face, A,* [1236](#)

*Book of Common Prayer,* [161](#)

*Book of Homilies,* [164](#)

Brave infant of Saguntum, clear, [1059](#)

*Break of Day,* [892](#)

*Brief and True Report of the New-Found Land of Virginia, A,* [790](#)

Broken in pieces all asunder, [1191](#)

*Bunch of Grapes, The*, [1192](#)

*Burning Babe, The*, [170](#)

Busy old fool, unruly sun, [888](#)

But be contented; when that fell arrest, [631](#)

But since we now eternal matter find, [1240](#)

By our first strange and fatal interview, [903](#)

**Calvin, John**, [151](#)

**Campion, Thomas**, [488](#), [489](#), [490](#), [499](#)

Can I not sin, but thou wilt be, [1227](#)

*Canonization, The*, [889](#)

*Carmen Deo Nostro*, [1215](#)

*Casket Letter Number 2*, [219](#)

*Castiglione's The Courtier*, [176](#)

**Cavendish, Margaret**, [1356](#)

*Certain Man, A*, [509](#)

**Cheke, Lady Mary**, [509](#)

*Church Monuments*, [1187](#)

**Clarendon, Edward Hyde, Earl of**, [1350](#)

*Cock-Crowing*, [1208](#)

Cold's the wind and wet's the rain, [477](#)

*Collar, The*, [1194](#)

Come, leave the loathed stage, [1065](#)

Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defy, [902](#)

Come, my Lucasia, since we see, [1262](#)

Come, sons of summer, by whose toil, [1224](#)

Come live with me and be my love (Donne), [895](#)

Come live with me and be my love (Marlowe), [495](#)

*Corinna's Going A-Maying*, [1222](#)

*Coronet, The*, [1267](#)

*Corruption*, [1205](#)

*Countess of Montgomery's Urania, The*, [1069](#)

*Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia, The*, [515](#)

**Crashaw, Richard**, [1211](#)

*Cries of London*, [506](#)

Cromwell, our chief of men, who through a cloud, [1425](#)

*Crown of Sonnets Dedicated to Love, A*, [1078](#)

*Cynthia*, [490](#)

*Damon the Mower*, [1277](#)

**Daniel, Samuel**, [469](#)

**Davies of Hereford, John**, [487](#), [498](#)



*Dear God, From Thy High Throne Look Down, [1227](#)*

*Death, [1198](#)*

Death, be not proud, though some have callèd thee, [912](#)

Death, thou wast once an uncouth, hideous thing, [1198](#)

*Death's Duel, [922](#)*

*Defense of Poesy, The, [524](#)*

*Definition of Love, The, [1274](#)*

**Dekker, Thomas, [477](#)**

*Delight in Disorder, [1221](#)*

*Denial, [1188](#)*

*De rerum natura, [1240](#)*

*Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World, The, [1364](#)*

*Description of Cookham, The, [936](#)*

*Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, [918](#)*

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws, [627](#)

*Dialogue Between the Soul and Body, A, [1268](#)*

*Dialogue Concerning Heresies, A, [149](#)*

Diana (on a time) walking the wood, [490](#)

*Discipline, [1197](#)*

*discovery of the large, rich, and beautiful Empire of Guiana, The,* [790](#)

*Doctor Faustus,* [581](#)

**Donne, John,** [882](#)

*Doralicia's Ditty,* [500](#)

*Doubt of Future Foes, The,* [240](#)

**Dowland, John,** [501](#)

**Dowriche, Anne,** [252](#)

**Drayton, Michael,** [468](#), [484](#), [491](#), [493](#)

*Dreams,* [1220](#)

Drink to me only with thine eyes, [1055](#)

*Duchess of Malfi, The,* [1080](#)

Dull as I was, to think that a court fly, [1236](#)

*Dutch Libel, The,* [480](#)

*Easter,* [1183](#)

*Easter Wings,* [1184](#)

*Ecstasy, The,* [898](#)

*Eiusdem ad Lectorem, de Authore,* [254](#)

*Elegy 16. On His Mistress,* [903](#)

*Elegy 19. To His Mistress Going to Bed,* [904](#)

**Elizabeth I, [230](#)**

*English Bible, The, [146](#)*

*Epigrams, [1049](#)*

*Epitaph: On Her Son H. P. at St. Syth's Church, Where Her Body Was Interred, [1264](#)*

*Epithalamion, [455](#)*

*Essays, [1157](#)*

*Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit, [511](#)*

Even now, that care which on thy crown attends, [553](#)

Even such is time, which takes in trust, [479](#)

*Faerie Queene, The, [263](#)*

False hope which feeds but to destroy, and spill, [1077](#)

False life! a foil and no more, when, [1210](#)

*Farewell, False Love, [493](#)*

Farewell, false love, the oracle of lies, [493](#)

Farewell, sweet Cookham, where I first obtained, [936](#)

Farewell: thou art too dear for my possessing, [632](#)

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy, [1050](#)

Father of lights! what sunny seed, [1208](#)

**Filmer, Robert, [1325](#)**

Fine madam Would-Be, wherefore should you fear, [1049](#)

*First Examination of Anne Askew, The*, [154](#)

*Flaming Heart, The*, [1215](#)

*Flea, The*, [886](#)

*Flower, The*, [1195](#)

Forbear, bold youth, all's Heaven here, [1260](#)

*Forerunners, The*, [1196](#)

*Forest, The*, [1053](#)

*Forget Not Yet*, [129](#)

Forget not yet the tried intent, [129](#)

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love, [889](#)

Fortune hath taken away my love, [243](#)

**Foxe, Emma**, [473](#)

**Foxe, John**, [157](#)

*Foxe's Acts and Monuments*, [215](#)

*Friendship's Mystery, To My Dearest Lucasia*, [1262](#)

From fairest creatures we desire increase, [625](#)

From you have I been absent in the spring, [633](#)

Full many a glorious morning have I seen, [629](#)

*Funeral, The*, [900](#)

*Garden, The*, [1280](#)

**Gascoigne, George**, [467](#), [492](#)

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, [1224](#)

*General History of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles, The*, [830](#)

Get up! Get up for shame! The blooming morn, [1222](#)

Go, smiling souls, your new-built cages break, [1212](#)

Go, soul, the body's guest, [485](#)

Go and catch a falling star, [887](#)

Goe little booke: thy selfe present, [257](#)

"*Golden Speech*," *The*, [245](#)

Good and great God, can I not think of thee, [1056](#)

*Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward*, [915](#)

*Good ladies, take pity and grant our desire*, [506](#)

*Good-Morrow, The*, [887](#)

Grant them removed, and grant that this your noise, [482](#)

*Grasshopper, The*, [1233](#)

**Greene, Robert**, [500](#)

**Greville, Fulke**, [473](#), [483](#)

**Grey, Lady Jane**, [209](#)

Gut eats all day, and lechers all the night, [1053](#)

Had we but world enough, and time, [1272](#)

Happy those early days! when I, [1203](#)

Happy ye leaves when as those lilly hands, [452](#)

**Harington, Sir John, [509](#)**

**Hariot, Thomas, [790](#)**

Hark how the mower Damon sung, [1277](#)

Have mercy, Lord, have mercy: for I know, [167](#)

Have ye beheld (with much delight), [1226](#)

Having been tenant long to a rich lord, [1182](#)

Hence loathèd Melancholy, [1393](#)

Hence vain deluding joys, [1397](#)

**Herbert, George, [1180](#)**

**Herbert, Mary (Sidney), Countess of Pembroke, [552](#)**

Here a little child I stand, [1227](#)

Here lies, to each her parents' ruth, [1050](#)

Here we are all, by day; by night, we're hurled, [1221](#)

*Hero and Leander, [563](#)*

**Herrick, Robert, [1219](#)**

*Hesperides, [1220](#)*

His golden locks time hath to silver turned, [470](#)

*History of the Rebellion, The*, [1350](#)

*History of the World, The*, [474](#)

**Hobbes, Thomas**, [1337](#)

**Hoby, Sir Thomas**, [176](#)

*Hock Cart, or Harvest Home, The*, [1224](#)

*Holdfast, The*, [1193](#)

*Holy Sonnets*, [910](#)

**Hooker, Richard**, [167](#)

*Horatian Ode, An*, [1282](#)

How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean, [1195](#)

How like a winter hath my absence been, [633](#)

*How Many Paltry, Foolish, Painted things*, [484](#)

How oft when thou, my music, music play'st, [636](#)

How rich, O Lord! how fresh thy visits are!, [1206](#)

*How Soon Hath Time*, [1423](#)

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth, [1423](#)

How vainly men themselves amaze, [1280](#)

**Hume, Tobias**, [504](#)

*Hunting for Hire*, [506](#)

*Hunting of the Hare, The, [1359](#)*

**Hutchinson, Lucy, [1239](#)**

*Hymn to God My God, in My Sickness, [916](#)*

*Hymn to God the Father, A, [917](#)*

I am a little world made cunningly, [911](#)

*I Am the Door, [1213](#)*

I can love both fair and brown, [889](#)

I cannot tell who loves the skeleton, [1235](#)

*I Care Not for These Ladies, [489](#)*

I dreamed this mortal part of mine, [1221](#)

If all the world and love were young, [496](#)

If everything hath sense and reason, then, [1361](#)

*I Find No Peace, [124](#)*

I find no peace, and all my war is done, [124](#)

If poisonous minerals, and if that tree, [912](#)

*If There Were (Oh!) an Hellespont of Cream, [487](#)*

I grieve and dare not show my discontent, [240](#)

I have examined and do find, [1263](#)

I have lost, and lately, these, [1220](#)

*Il Penseroso, [1397](#)*



*Indifferent, The,* [889](#)

In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn, [639](#)

*In Night When Colors All to Black Are Cast,* [483](#)

I now think Love is rather deaf than blind, [1057](#)

*Institution of Christian Religion, The,* [151](#)

In the nativity of time, [1237](#)

In the old age black was not counted fair, [636](#)

In this little urn is laid, [1226](#)

In this strange labyrinth how shall I turn?, [1078](#)

In time we see that silver drops, [500](#)

*Inviting a Friend to Supper,* [1052](#)

I saw eternity the other night, [1206](#)

I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds, and bowers, [1220](#)

I struck the board and cried, "No more, [1194](#)

I that have been a lover, and could show it, [1057](#)

I think not on the state, nor am concerned, [1261](#)

I threatened to observe the strict decree, [1193](#)

*It Was a Time When Silly Bees Could Speak,* [501](#)

It was not certain when a certain preacher, [509](#)

It will be looked for, book, when some but see, [1049](#)

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I, [885](#)

*Jack and Joan, They Think No Ill*, [499](#)

*John Jewel's An Apology or Answer in Defence of the Church of England*, [159](#)

*Jolly Good Ale and Old*, [475](#)

**Jonson, Ben**, [941](#)

*Jordan (1)*, [1186](#)

*Jordan (2)*, [1191](#)

Joy, I did lock thee up; but some bad man, [1192](#)

Just like unto a nest of boxes round, [1358](#)

Kind pity chokes my spleen; brave scorn forbids, [906](#)

*L'Allegro*, [1393](#)

**Lanyer, Aemilia**, [924](#)

*Lecture upon the Shadow, A*, [902](#)

Let man's soul be a sphere, and then, in this, [915](#)

Let me not to the marriage of true minds, [635](#)

Let me pour forth, [893](#)

Let not my love be called idolatry, [634](#)

*Letter of the Lady Jane, Sent unto Her Father, A*, [213](#)

*Letter of the Lady Jane to M. H., Late Chaplain to the Duke of Suffolk Her Father, A*, [211](#)

*Letter to Elizabeth I, May 17, 1568, A, [222](#)*

*Letter to Henry VIII, [204](#)*

*Letter to King James VI of Scotland, February 14, 1587, A, [242](#)*

*Letter to Mary, Queen of Scots, February 24, 1567, A, [239](#)*

*Letter to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, February 10, 1586, A, [241](#)*

*Letter to Sir Amyas Paulet, August 1586, A, [241](#)*

*Leviathan, [1338](#)*

*Lie, The, [484](#)*

**Ligon, Richard, [837](#)**

*Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, [630](#)*

*Like to the Indians scorched with the sun, [1075](#)*

*Litany in Time of Plague, A, [496](#)*

**Locke, Anne Vaughan, [166](#)**

**Lodge, Thomas, [472](#)**

*Long Love That in My Thought Doth Harbor, The, [122](#)*

*Look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest, [625](#)*

*Lord, how can man preach thy eternal word?, [1188](#)*

*Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store, [1184](#)*

*Love (3), [1199](#)*

*Love, That Doth Reign and Live within My Thought, [136](#)*

Love a child is ever crying, [1078](#)

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back, [1199](#)

**Lovelace, Richard,** [1232](#)

Love like a juggler comes to play his prize, [1077](#)

*Love Made in the First Age. To Chloris,* [1237](#)

*Lover Showeth How He Is Forsaken of Such as He Sometime Enjoyed, The,* [127](#)

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show, [541](#)

*Lucasta,* [1232](#)

Lucy, you brightness of our sphere, who are, [1051](#)

*Luke 11.[27],* [1213](#)

*Lullaby of a Lover, The,* [467](#)

*Lycidas,* [1401](#)

**Lyly, John,** [511](#)

*Madam, Withouten Many Words,* [126](#)

*Man,* [1189](#)

*Mannerly Margery Milk and Ale,* [39](#)

*Mariners' Song,* [508](#)

Mark but this flea, and mark in this, [886](#)

**Marlowe, Christopher,** [495](#), [561](#)

*Married State, A*, [1259](#)

**Marvell, Andrew**, [1265](#)

**Mary, Queen of Scots**, [217](#)

**Mary I (Mary Tudor)**, [203](#)

*Masque of Blackness, The*, [1039](#)

*Meditation of a Penitent Sinner, A*, [166](#)

*Methought I Saw My Late Espoused Saint*, [1427](#)

**Milton, John**, [1328](#), [1381](#)

*Mine own John Poins*, [131](#)

Mine own John Poins, since ye delight to know, [131](#)

*Moderate, No. 28, The* [The Trial of King Charles I, the first day],  
[1317](#)

**More, Sir Thomas**, [43](#), [149](#)

*Mower's Song, The*, [1279](#)

*Mower to the Glowworms, The*, [1279](#)

Much suspected by me, [232](#)

*My Galley*, [125](#)

My galley charged with forgetfulness, [125](#)

My God, I heard this day, [1189](#)

My love is as a fever, longing still, [639](#)

My Love is of a birth as rare, [1274](#)

*My Lute, Awake!*, [128](#)

My lute, awake! Perform the last, [128](#)

My mind was once the true survey, [1279](#)

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun, [637](#)

My muse now happy, lay thyself to rest, [1079](#)

My pain, still smothered in my grievèd breast, [1077](#)

*My Picture Left in Scotland*, [1057](#)

My prime of youth is but a frost of cares, [478](#)

My spirit is too weak—mortality, [949](#)

*My Sweetest Lesbia*, [488](#)

My sweetest Lesbia, let us live and love, [488](#)

*Narrative of the Execution of the Queen of Scots*, [224](#)

**Nashe, Thomas**, [496](#)

*Nature, That Washed Her Hands in Milk*, [502](#)

*New Atlantis, The*, [1175](#)

*New Brooms*, [505](#)

New brooms, green brooms, will you buy any?, [505](#)

*New Year's Gift Sent to the Parliament and Army*, A, [1332](#)

*Noble Numbers*, [1227](#)

*Nocturnal upon Saint Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day, A, [894](#)*

No longer mourn for me when I am dead, [631](#)

No more be grieved at that which thou hast done, [629](#)

*Nothing but "No" and "I" and "I" and "No"?, [491](#)*

Not marble nor the gilded monuments, [629](#)

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul, [634](#)

*Novum Organum, [1171](#)*

*Now Winter Nights Enlarge, [490](#)*

*Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn, The, [1270](#)*

*Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd, The, [496](#)*

O, how I faint when I of you do write, [632](#)

O, who shall from this dungeon raise, [1268](#)

*Obedience of a Christian Man, The, [147](#)*

*Ode to Himself, [1065](#)*

*Of Great Place, [1160](#)*

*Of Many Worlds in this World, [1358](#)*

*Of Marriage and Single Life, [1158](#)*

*Of Masques and Triumphs, [1166](#)*

*Of Negotiating, [1165](#)*

*Of Plantations, [1163](#)*

*Of Sense and Reason Exercised in their Different Shapes, [1361](#)*

*Of Studies* [1597 version], [1167](#)

*Of Studies* [1625 version], [1168](#)

*Of Superstition, [1162](#)*

*Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, [167](#)*

*Of Truth, [1157](#)*

Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one, [913](#)

Oh, what a lantern, what a lamp of light, [557](#)

*O Happy Dames, That May Embrace, [139](#)*

O Lord, in me there lieth nought, [557](#)

*On a Maidenhead, [471](#)*

*On Gut, [1053](#)*

On Hellespont, guilty of true-loves' blood, [563](#)

*On Monsieur's Departure, [240](#)*

*On My First Daughter, [1050](#)*

*On My First Son, [1050](#)*

*On Our Crucified Lord Naked and Bloody, [1214](#)*

*On Shakespeare, [1393](#)*

*On Something, That Walks Somewhere, [1049](#)*

*On the Late Massacre in Piedmont, [1426](#)*



*On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, [1385](#)*

*On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament, [1424](#)*

*On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord, [1214](#)*

*Oration of Queen Mary in the Guildhall, on the First of February 1554, The, [207](#)*

*Order and Disorder, [1243](#)*

*Othello, [640](#)*

*O these wakeful wounds of thine, [1214](#)*

*O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power, [636](#)*

*O thou that swing'st upon the waving hair, [1233](#)*

*Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, [1074](#)*

*Paradise Lost, [1427](#)*

*Passage of Our Most Dread Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth through the City of London to Westminster on the Day before Her Coronation, The, [233](#)*

*Passionate Shepherd to His Love, The, [495](#)*

*Patriarcha, [1326](#)*

*Perfect Diurnal of Some Passages in Parliament, No. 288, A, [1320](#)*

*Petrarch, Rima 134, [124](#)*

*Petrarch, Rima 140, [123](#)*

*Petrarch, Rima 164, [136](#)*

*Petrarch, Rima 189, [125](#)*

*Petrarch, Rima 190, [124](#)*

*Petrarch, Rima 310, [135](#)*

**Philips, Katherine, [1258](#)**

*Picture of Little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers, The, [1275](#)*

*Pluck the Fruit and Taste the Pleasure, [472](#)*

*Poems, [1385](#)*

*Poems and Fancies, [1357](#)*

*Poetess's Hasty Resolution, The, [1357](#)*

Poor desolate garden, smile no more on me, [1242](#)

Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth, [638](#)

*Prayer (1), [1186](#)*

Prayer, the church's banquet; angels' age, [1186](#)

*Prayer of the Lady Jane, A, [214](#)*

*Psalm 52, [556](#)*

*Psalm 139, [557](#)*

*Psalm 119: O, [557](#)*

*Pulley, The, [1195](#)*

**Pulter, Hester, [1224](#)**

*Queen and Huntress, [1062](#)*

Queen and huntress, chaste and fair, [1062](#)

*Queen's Champion Retires, The*, [470](#)

*Quickness*, [1210](#)

**Raleigh, Sir Walter**, [474](#), [478](#), [479](#), [484](#), [493](#), [502](#), [790](#)

*Rape of Lucrece, The*, [503](#)

Reading my verses, I liked them so well, [1357](#)

*Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelaty, The*, [1408](#)

*Redemption*, [1182](#)

*Regeneration*, [1201](#)

*Relation Concerning Dorothy Waugh's Cruel Usage by the Mayor of Carlisle*, [1355](#)

*Relic, The*, [901](#)

*Religious Use of Taking Tobacco, A*, [503](#)

Renowned empress, and Great Britain's queen, [925](#)

*Reply, The*, [510](#)

*Retreat, The*, [1203](#)

Rise, heart, thy lord is risen. Sing his praise, [1183](#)

*Robert Garnier's Marc Antoine*, [560](#)

*Roger Ascham's Schoolmaster*, [210](#)

Sad Nature's sighs gave the alarms, [1243](#)

*Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, [928](#)

*Satire 3*, [905](#)

*Schoolmaster, The*, [172](#)

*Second Letter to Her Father, A*, [215](#)

See with what simplicity, [1275](#)

**Shakespeare, William**, [482](#), [503](#), [620](#)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?, [626](#)

*Shepherdes Calender, The*, [257](#)

Show me, dear Christ, thy spouse so bright and clear, [914](#)

**Sidney, Sir Philip**, [514](#)

*Silence, and Stealth of Days!*, [1204](#)

Silence, and stealth of days! 'tis now, [1204](#)

*Silex Scintillans*, [1201](#)

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea, [630](#)

Since I am coming to that holy room, [916](#)

Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt, [914](#)

Sing lullaby, as women do, [467](#)

Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye, [630](#)

Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls, [908](#)

*Sir Thomas More*, [482](#)

*Sir Walter Raleigh to His Son, [479](#)*

**Skelton, John, [38](#)**

Small atoms of themselves a world may make, [1358](#)

**Smith, Captain John, [827](#)**

*So Cruel Prison How Could Betide, [137](#)*

So cruel prison how could betide, alas, [137](#)

*Soldiers' Song, [508](#)*

Some have no money, [41](#)

*Song (Donne), [891](#)*

*Song (Wroth), [1076](#)*

*Song, The (Donne), [887](#)*

*Song: To Celia, [1055](#)*

*Sonnet, to the Noble Lady, the Lady Mary Wroth, A, [1057](#)*

*Sonnets (Shakespeare), [624](#)*

*Sooty Season, The, [135](#)*

**Southwell, Lady Anne, [510](#)**

**Southwell, Robert, [170](#)**

*Speech to a Joint Delegation of Lords and Commons, November 5, 1566, A, [236](#)*

*Speech to the House of Commons, January 28, 1563, [235](#)*

*Speech to the Troops at Tilbury, [244](#)*

**Spenser, Edmund, [254](#)**

Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side, [912](#)

Stand still, and I will read to thee, [902](#)

*Stand Whoso List, [130](#)*

Stand whoso list upon the slipper top, [130](#)

*Steps to the Temple, [1212](#)*

**Stevenson, William, [475](#)**

**Still, John S., [475](#)**

**Strachey, William, [814](#)**

*Sun Rising, The, [888](#)*

Suppose he had been tabled at thy teats, [1213](#)

Sure it was so. Man in those early days, [1205](#)

**Surrey, Henry Howard, Earl of, [134](#)**

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright, [1189](#)

Sweetest love, I do not go, [891](#)

Sweetest love, return again, [1076](#)

Take heed mine eyes, how you your looks do cast, [1076](#)

Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind, [1232](#)

*Tempest, The, [726](#)*

*Temple, The*, [1182](#)

*Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, The*, [1328](#)

That no man yet could in the Bible find, [510](#)

That time of year thou may'st in me behold, [631](#)

The doubt of future foes exiles my present joy, [240](#)

The forward youth that would appear, [1282](#)

The harbingers are come: see, see their mark, [1196](#)

The Indian weed witherèd quite, [504](#)

The meditation of this monarch's love, [928](#)

*There's Nothing Grieves Me, But That Age Should Haste*, [468](#)

The soote season, that bud and bloom forth brings, [135](#)

The time is come I must depart, [193](#)

The wanton troopers riding by, [1270](#)

Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame, [637](#)

*They Flee from Me*, [127](#)

They flee from me, that sometime did me seek, [127](#)

They that have power to hurt and will do none, [633](#)

Th' have left thee naked, Lord, O that they had, [1214](#)

This is the month, and this the happy morn, [1385](#)

Thou art not, Penshurst, built to envious show, [1053](#)

Though sharp the seed by Anger sown, [254](#)

Thou hast begun well, Roe, which stand<sup>o</sup> well too, [1051](#)

Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?, [910](#)

Three things there be that prosper up apace, [479](#)

Throw away thy rod, [1197](#)

**Tichborne, Chidiock, [478](#)**

*Tichborne's Elegy, [478](#)*

Time's glory is to calm contending kings, [503](#)

'Tis the year's midnight and it is the day's, [894](#)

'Tis true, 'tis day; what though it be?, [892](#)

*To All Women in General, and Gentle Reader[s] Whatsoever, [253](#)*

*To Althea, from Prison, [1234](#)*

*Tobacco, [504](#)*

To draw no envy, Shakespeare, on thy name, [1063](#)

*To Fine Lady Would-Be, [1049](#)*

*To Heaven, [1056](#)*

*To His Book's End, [1223](#)*

To his book's end this last line he'd have placed, [1227](#)

*To His Conscience, [1227](#)*

*To His Coy Mistress, [1272](#)*



*To Lucy, Countess of Bedford, with Mr. Donne's Satires, [1051](#)*

*To Mrs. M. A. at Parting, [1263](#)*

*To My Book, [1049](#)*

*Tonight, grave sir, both my poor house and I, [1052](#)*

*To Sir Henry Wotton, [905](#)*

*To Sir Thomas Roe, [1051](#)*

*To the Garden at Owthorpe, [1242](#)*

*To the Immortal Memory and Friendship of That Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison, [1059](#)*

*To the Infant Martyrs, [1212](#)*

*To the Ladie Anne, Countess of Dorset, [927](#)*

*To the Lord General Cromwell, May 1652, [1425](#)*

*To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare, [1063](#)*

*To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, [925](#)*

*To the Reader, [249](#)*

*To the Right Worshipful and Worthily Beloved Mother, the Lady F., [248](#)*

*To the Right worshipful Her Loving Brother, Master Pearse Edgecombe, [252](#)*

*To the Thrice-Sacred Queen Elizabeth, [553](#)*

*To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time,* [1224](#)

To you I dedicate this work of grace, [927](#)

*To You That Life Possess,* [473](#)

*Triumph of Death, The,* [498](#)

*Troll the Bowl, the Jolly Nut-Brown Bowl,* [477](#)

*True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados, A,* [836](#)

*True Copie of the Petition of Gentlewomen and Tradesmens Wives, A,* [1310](#)

*True Repertory of the Wreck,* [815](#)

*Tunning of Elinour Rumming, The,* [41](#)

Twice or thrice had I loved thee, [892](#)

Two loves I have of comfort and despair, [638](#)

**Tyler, Margaret,** [249](#)

**Tyndale, William,** [147](#)

Tyrant, why swell'st thou thus, [556](#)

*Underwood,* [1057](#)

*Unprofitableness,* [1206](#)

*Upon Appleton House,* [1287](#)

*Upon His Verses,* [1226](#)

*Upon Julia's Clothes,* [1226](#)

*Upon Prue, His Maid, [1226](#)*

*Upon the Death of My Dear and Lovely Daughter, Jane Pulter, [1228](#)*

*Upon the Double Murder of King Charles, [1261](#)*

*Upon the Loss of His Mistresses, [1220](#)*

*Upon the Nipples of Julia's Breast, [1226](#)*

*Utopia, [46](#)*

*Valediction: Forbidding Mourning, A, [897](#)*

*Valediction: Of Weeping, A, [893](#)*

**Vaughan, Henry, [1200](#)**

*Verse Exchange between Elizabeth and Sir Walter Raleigh, [243](#)*

*Verses Written with a Diamond, [232](#)*

*View But This Tulip, [1230](#)*

*View but this tulip, rose, or gillyflower, [1230](#)*

*Vine, The, [1221](#)*

*Virtue, [1185](#)*

*Volpone, [944](#)*

*Waterfall, The, [1209](#)*

**Waugh, Dorothy, [1354](#)**

*We be soldiers three, [508](#)*

*We be three poor mariners, [508](#)*

**Webster, John, [1079](#)**

Well-meaning readers! you that come as friends, [1216](#)

What if this present were the world's last night?, [913](#)

What needs my Shakespeare for his honored bones, [1391](#)

What offspring other men have got, [1226](#)

What on earth deserves our trust?, [1264](#)

*What Vaileth Truth?*, [126](#)

What vaileth truth? or by it to take pain, [126](#)

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes, [628](#)

Whenas in silks my Julia goes, [1226](#)

When by thy scorn, O murderess, I am dead, [896](#)

When everyone to pleasing pastime hies, [1075](#)

When first my lines of heavenly joys made mention, [1191](#)

When first thou didst entice to thee my heart, [1184](#)

When for the thorns with which I long, too long, [1267](#)

When God at first made man, [1195](#)

When I consider every thing that grows, [626](#)

*When I Consider How My Light Is Spent*, [1426](#)

When I do count the clock that tells the time, [626](#)

When in the chronicle of wasted time, [634](#)

When Love with unconfined wings, [1234](#)

*When Men Shall Find Thy Flower, Thy Glory, Pass,* [469](#)

When my devotions could not pierce, [1188](#)

When my grave is broke up again, [901](#)

When my love swears that she is made of truth, [638](#)

When night's black mantle could most darkness prove, [1074](#)

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought, [628](#)

Where, like a pillow on a bed, [898](#)

Where the remote Bermudas ride, [1267](#)

While that my soul repairs to her devotion, [1187](#)

**Whitney, Isabella,** [193](#)

Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harm, [900](#)

Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*, [637](#)

*Who List His Wealth and Ease Retain,* [130](#)

Who liveth so merry in all this land, [507](#)

Who says that fictions only and false hair, [1186](#)

*Whoso List to Hunt,* [123](#)

Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind, [123](#)

*Will and Testament,* [193](#)

*Will Ye Buy a Fine Dog?,* [471](#)

Will ye buy a fine dog, with a hole in his head, [471](#)

**Wilson, Robert,** [505](#), [506](#)

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun, [915](#)

*Windows, The,* [1188](#)

**Wisdome, Robert,** [503](#)

**Wistanley, Gerrard,** [1331](#)

Within this sober frame expect, [1287](#)

With lullay, lullay, like a child, [40](#)

*With Lullay, Lullay, Like a Child,* [40](#)

With what deep murmurs through time's silent stealth, [1209](#)

*World, The,* [1206](#)

*World Made by Atoms, A,* [1358](#)

**Wroth, Mary,** [1067](#)

**Wyatt, Sir Thomas, the Elder,** [120](#)

*Wyatt Resteth Here, That Quick Could Never Rest,* [138](#)

Ye learnèd sisters which have oftentimes, [455](#)

Ye living lamps, by whose dear light, [1279](#)

Yes, that a maidenhead we call, [471](#)

Ye strangers that do inhabit in this land, [480](#)

Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more, [1402](#)

*You That Seek What Life Is in Death,* [473](#)

# Index

*Absalom and Achitophel: A Poem*, [34](#)

**Addison, Joseph**, [125](#), [281](#), [325](#)

*Addressed to Sensibility*, [1039](#)

*Aims of the Spectator, The*, [287](#)

All human things are subject to decay, [59](#)

All my past life is mine no more, [143](#)

*Annus Mirabilis*, [32](#)

*Arabian Nights Entertainments, The*, [297](#)

Arise, my soul, on wings enraptured, rise, [989](#)

As Merc'ry travelled through a wood, [201](#)

As Rochefoucauld his maxims drew, [366](#)

As some brave admiral, in former war, [133](#)

**Astell, Mary**, [213](#)

At length, by so much importunity pressed, [637](#)

*Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Heroic License, The*, [71](#)

Awake, my St. John! leave all meaner things, [566](#)

*Bard, The*, [903](#)



*Beggar's Opera, The*, [587](#)

**Behn, Aphra**, [145](#)

**Benezet, Anthony**, [939](#)

**Boswell , James**, [883](#), [981](#)

**Boyle, Robert**, [121](#)

*Brief in Support of Joseph Knight, A*, [952](#)

**Bunyan, John**, [83](#)

**Burke, Edmund**, [351](#)

**Burney, Frances**, [1041](#)

Careful observers may foretell the hour, [364](#)

**Carter, Elizabeth**, [783](#)

*Castaway, The*, [1079](#)

**Cavendish, Margaret**, [107](#)

**Chapone, Hester**, [785](#)

**Chudleigh, Lady Mary**, [746](#)

*Citizen of the World, The*, [336](#)

*Clarissa*, Preface to, [694](#)

*Cloe to Artimesa*, [747](#)

**Collier, Mary**, [736](#)

**Collins, William**, [907](#)

**Congreve, William,** [220](#), [672](#)

Could we stop the time that's flying, [745](#)

**Cowper, William,** [1074](#)

**Cugoano, Ottobah,** [953](#)

**Davys, Mary,** [686](#)

*Declaration of Independence, The,* [339](#)

**Defoe, Daniel,** [674](#)

*Description of a City Shower, A,* [364](#)

*Deserted Village, The,* [913](#)

*Dialogue, A,* [783](#)

*Diary, The (Pepys),* [74](#)

*Dictionary of the English Language, A,* [868](#)

Did I, my lines intend for public view, [199](#)

*Disabled Debauchee, The,* [133](#)

*Disappointment, The,* [148](#)

*Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire, A,* [72](#)

**Dryden, John,** [30](#)

**Duck, Stephen,** [729](#)

*Elegy on Captain Cook, An,* [348](#)

*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,* [899](#)

*Elegy XX, [969](#)*

*Eloisa to Abelard, [557](#)*

*Epigram on Milton, [67](#)*

*Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband, [638](#)*

*Epistle to a Lady, An, [771](#)*

*Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, [573](#)*

**Equiano, Olaudah, [1081](#)**

*Essay Concerning Human Understanding, An, [118](#)*

*Essay of Dramatic Poesy, An, [68](#)*

*Essay on Criticism, An, [520](#)*

*Essay on Man, An, [566](#)*

*Essay on Slavery, An, [972](#)*

*Essay on Woman, An, [769](#)*

*Evelina, [1043](#)*

*Fair lovely maid, or if that title be, [151](#)*

*Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze, [650](#)*

*Felix's Petition, [949](#)*

*Female Husband, The, [756](#)*

*Female Quixote, The, [701](#)*

*Female Solder; or, The Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell, The,* [774](#)

**Fielding, Henry,** [689](#), [755](#)

**Finch, Anne, Countess of Winchilsea,** [199](#), [745](#)

**Fitzgerald, Gerald,** [343](#)

Five hours (and who can do it less in?), [749](#)

**Fordyce, James,** [707](#)

*Fortunate Foundlings, The,* [688](#)

*Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland,* [923](#)

From harmony, from heavenly harmony, [64](#)

*Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, The,* [685](#)

**Gay, John,** [586](#)

*General Heads for a Natural History of a Country, Great or Small,* [122](#)

Genius of Africk! whether thou bestrid'st, [963](#)

**Goldsmith, Oliver,** [335](#), [912](#)

**Grainger, James,** [962](#)

**Gray, Thomas,** [897](#)

**Greville, Frances,** [1008](#)

*Gulliver's Travels,* [377](#)

Hail, happy day, when, smiling like the morn, [994](#)

**Hall, Prince,** [951](#)

**Hammon, Jupiter,** [971](#)

**Haywood, Eliza,** [649](#), [688](#)

*History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia, The,* [802](#)

*History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, The,* [691](#)

*History of the Royal Society, The,* [96](#)

**Hogarth, William,** [718](#)

**Hooke, Robert,** [100](#)

*Hoop Petticoat, The,* [292](#)

**Hume, David,** [999](#)

If aught of oaten stop, or pastoral song, [908](#)

Immortal bard! thou favorite of the nine!, [737](#)

*Imperfect Enjoyment, The,* [134](#)

*Incognita; or, Love and Duty Reconciled,* [672](#)

*Injured Islanders, The,* [344](#)

*Inkle and Yarico,* [289](#)

In pious times, ere priestcraft did begin, [35](#)

In such a night, when every louder wind, [211](#)

*Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself, The, [1082](#)*

In these deep solitudes and awful cells, [558](#)

*Introduction, The, [199](#)*

In vain, dear Madam, yes, in vain you strive, [771](#)

In vain to me the smiling mornings shine, [902](#)

**Jefferson, Thomas, [338](#)**

**Johnson, Samuel, [696](#), [788](#), [952](#)**

*Journal and Letters, The (Burney), [1064](#)*

*Jubilate Agno, [910](#)*

*Lady's Dressing Room, The, [749](#)*

**Leapor, Mary, [769](#)**

**Lennox, Charlotte, [700](#)**

Let Observation, with extensive view, [790](#)

*Letter of Mr. Isaac Newton . . . Containing His New Theory about Light and Colors, A, [113](#)*

*Letters . . . Written during Her Travels, [640](#)*

*Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African, [1012](#)*

*Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady, [785](#)*

*Letter to Dafnis April 2d 1685, A, [746](#)*

*Letter to Samson Occom, [996](#)*

*Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, The, [1022](#)*

*Life and Strange Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, The, [675](#)*

*Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., The, [884](#)*

**Locke, John, [117](#), [930](#)**

*Love and Life, [143](#)*

Love a woman! You're an ass, [145](#)

*Lover: A Ballad, The, [637](#)*

*Mac Flecknoe, [59](#)*

**Mackenzie, Henry, [1025](#)**

**Macpherson, James, [922](#)**

MAECENAS, you, beneath the myrtle shade, [987](#)

**Mahomet, Dean, [357](#)**

*Man of Feeling, The, [1026](#)*

**Mansfield, William Murray, Lord of, [948](#)**

*Marriage A-la-Mode, [720](#)*

**Masters, Mary, [748](#)**

*Mercury and the Elephant: A Prefatory Fable, [201](#)*

*Micrographia, [101](#)*

*Modest Proposal, A, [511](#)*

**Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley, [633](#), [752](#)**

*Montaukett Petition, [355](#)*

**More, Hannah, [976](#)**

*Mr. Burke's Speech . . . on Mr. Fox's East India Bill, [352](#)*

Naked she lay, clasped in my longing arms, [134](#)

*New Account of Some Parts of Guinea, and the Slave Trade, A, [934](#)*

**Newton, Sir Isaac, [112](#)**

*No Abolition of Slavery; or, the Universal Empire of Love, [981](#)*

*Nocturnal Reverie, A, [211](#)*

Noodles, who rave for abolition, [982](#)

Nothing, thou elder brother even to shade, [136](#)

Obscurest night involved the sky, [1079](#)

*Observations upon Experimental Philosophy, [108](#)*

**Occom, Samson, [355](#)**

*Ode: Rule, Britannia, [334](#)*

*Ode on the Death of a Favorite Cat, [897](#)*

*Ode to Evening, [908](#)*

*Ode to Sensibility, [1038](#)*

Oft I've implored the gods in vain, [1009](#)

Oh! Sensibility! Thou busy nurse, [1039](#)



*On Being Brought from Africa to America*, [989](#)

One day the amorous Lysander, [148](#)

*On Imagination*, [992](#)

*On the Scale of Being*, [128](#)

*On Useless Science*, [126](#)

*Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave*, [152](#)

Our forefathers came from Africa, [972](#)

**Pepys, Samuel**, [74](#)

*Petition to the State of Massachusetts, A*, [951](#)

*Pilgrim's Progress, The*, [84](#)

*Pleasures of the Imagination, The*, [281](#)

**Pope, Alexander**, [517](#)

*Prayer for Indifference, A*, [1009](#)

*Preface, in Answer to Some Objections to Reflections upon Marriage*,  
A, [216](#)

*Preface to Shakespeare, The*, [876](#)

*Progress of Romance, The*, [711](#)

*Rambler 4*, [697](#)

*Rambler 60*, [799](#)

*Rape of the Lock, The*, [537](#)

*Reasons That Induced Dr. Swift to Write a Poem Called the Lady's Dressing Room, The,* [752](#)

**Reeve, Clara,** [709](#)

**Richardson, Samuel,** [692](#)

*Royal Exchange, The,* [325](#)

"Ruin seize thee, ruthless King!, [903](#)

**Ryves, Elizabeth,** [1037](#)

**Sancho, Ignatius,** [1011](#), [1019](#)

*Satire against Reason and Mankind, A,* [137](#)

*Saturday. The Small Pox,* [634](#)

Says Body to Mind, "'tis amazing to see, [783](#)

*Seasons, The,* [726](#)

*Sentimental Journey through France and Italy, A,* [1023](#)

*Sermon IV: On Female Virtue,* [707](#)

**Seward, Anna,** [348](#)

**Shenstone, William,** [969](#)

*Slavery, a Poem,* [977](#)

**Smart, Christopher,** [909](#)

**Smith, Adam,** [1004](#)

**Snelgrave, William,** [934](#)

**Snell, Hannah, [773](#)**

*Some Historical Account of Guinea, [940](#)*

*Some Reflections upon Marriage, [213](#)*

*Somerset Ruling, The, [948](#)*

*Song (Rochester), [145](#)*

*Song for St. Cecilia's Day, A, [64](#)*

*Sonnet on the Death of Mr. Richard West, [902](#)*

*Spectator's Club, The, [283](#)*

*Spleen, The, [202](#)*

**Sprat, Thomas, [96](#)**

**Steele, Sir Richard, [281](#)**

**Sterne, Laurence, [1019](#)**

Such perfect bliss, fair Cloris, we, [144](#)

*Sugar-Cane, The, [963](#)*

Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain, [913](#)

**Swift, Jonathan, [362](#), [749](#)**

*Task, The, [1074](#)*

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day, [899](#)

*Theory of Moral Sentiments, The, [1004](#)*

The sordid wretch who ne'er has known, [1038](#)

The western sun withdraws the shortened day, [726](#)

The wretched Flavia on her couch reclined, [634](#)

Think not this paper comes with vain pretense, [638](#)

This to the crown and blessing of my life, [746](#)

**Thomson, James,** [334](#), [726](#)

Though not to me, sweet bard, thy powers belong, [977](#)

*Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species,* [954](#)

*Thoughts on the Works of Providence,* [989](#)

Thou knowest my praise of nature most sincere, [1074](#)

Three poets, in three distant ages born, [67](#)

*Thresher's Labor, The,* [730](#)

Thy forests, Windsor! and thy green retreats, [329](#)

Thy various works, imperial queen, we see, [992](#)

'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill, [521](#)

*To a Lady, in a Letter,* [144](#)

*To Maecenas,* [987](#)

To show the lab'ring bosom's deep intent, [995](#)

*To S.M., a Young African Painter, on Seeing His Works,* [995](#)

*To the Fair Clarinda,* [151](#)

*To the Ladies,* [746](#)

*To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth,* [994](#)

*To the Same, Enquiring Why I Wept,* [748](#)

*To the University of Cambridge, in New-England,* [988](#)

*Travels of Dean Mahomet, The,* [358](#)

*Treatise of Human Nature, A,* [1000](#)

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land, [989](#)

'Twas on a lofty vase's side, [897](#)

*Two Treatises of Government,* [931](#)

*Unequal Fetters, The,* [745](#)

*Upon Nothing,* [136](#)

*Upon the Hurricane,* [205](#)

*Vanity of Human Wishes, The,* [790](#)

*Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift,* [366](#)

**Walker, Robert,** [773](#)

*Way of the World, The,* [221](#)

Were I (who to my cost already am, [137](#)

What art thou, Spleen, which ev'ry thing dost ape?, [202](#)

**Wheatley, Phillis,** [985](#)

When *Britain* first, at heaven's command, [334](#)

While an intrinsic ardor prompts to write, [988](#)

While vulgar souls their vulgar love pursue, [747](#)

Why droops his heart, with fancied woes forlorn?, [969](#)

Wife and servant are the same, [746](#)

**Wilmot, John, Second Earl of Rochester, [132](#)**

*Windsor-Forest, [329](#)*

Woman—a pleasing but a short-lived flower, [769](#)

*Woman's Labor, The, [737](#)*

*Works of Mary Davys, The, [686](#)*

**Yearsley, Ann, [1038](#)**

Yet London, empress of the northern clime, [32](#)

You fix a dagger in my heart, [748](#)

You have obeyed, you winds, that must fulfill, [205](#)